

THE PEONY OF PAO-YU

BY

F. HADLAND DAVIS

*Author of The Land of the Yellow Spring and
Other Japanese Stories ; Myths and Legends
of Japan ; Japan : From the Age of the
Gods to the Fall of Tsingtau ; etc.*

THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE

ADYAR, MADRAS, INDIA

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TO RAPUNZEL

THIS BOOK OF SHORT STORIES
IS LOVINGLY INSCRIBED

You wore a robe of blue and brown,
My Lady-love of Fancy Town.
I found you standing by a pool,
Watching two water-lilies cool,
Whose rounded buds on island leaves
Seem'd like a dream a fairy weaves.
There came a tiny little splash.
The water jewell'd with silver flash.
As some small fish swam gaily by
I saw you smile and heard you sigh.
I saw you quickly bending down,
My Lady-love of Fancy Town.
I saw the treasure of your breast
Rival the lilies of the West.
I loved the flowers upon your heart,
When little fish did swiftly dart,
When you were quickly bending down
In shining robe of blue and brown,
My Lady-love of Fancy Town.

F. H. D.

THE following stories were originally published in *Colour*, *The Pall Mall Magazine*, *The Sketch*, *The Sphere*, *The Theosophist* and *The Quest*. The Editors of these journals are thanked for their courtesy in allowing me to publish these stories in volume form.

PREFACE

IN correcting the proofs of the Japanese stories in the present volume I am aware of a too sombre note, and more particularly of a similarity, if not a sameness, in the make-up of these tales, all of which are touched with what the Japanese call the "Ah-ness of things". Having made this confession, I draw in my breath, bow, and beg the reader and reviewer to remember that these stories were published in various magazines, and the editorial demand was in no small measure responsible for this state of affairs. Lest those who peruse these stories should be inclined to weep too profusely, I have included *The Man who Stood on His Head*, *Dream Pills* and *Thanks to Omar*, in the hope that I may have the good fortune to restore them to the happy world of laughter.

Springfield
Churchill, Nr. Bristol
November 27, 1919

F. H. D.

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HUMOROUS AND FANTASTIC

THE MAN WHO STOOD ON HIS HEAD

I

KING BARJAM, the exalted ruler of a country so remote in the Far East that it is not even mentioned in the most expensive geography books, yawned. His Grand Vizier would like to have done so, had he possessed the necessary courage. After a moment's hesitation he twiddled his thumbs instead.

"I am weary," said the King.

"Ah!" replied the obsequious Grand Vizier, "weary with the weight of kingship."

"No, fool, I am simply bored with the stupidity of Court life, and you, Boobeejee, make but dull company. Everything seems to have gone wrong of late. My favourite wife, Fatima, has had for many days a swollen face, and the royal hunts have been made intolerable by the excessive trumpeting of elephants. If the Chief Magician cannot invent something more ingenious than the mango trick, which I am tired of seeing, we must certainly have him executed. Zalika's poems contain too lengthy references to the mole on his mistress' cheek, and if the doddering Swambu cannot make a better interpretation of

dreams, visions, and nightmares, we must bid him strike his head against a wall and see stars of no particular constellation. Now, my none too Grand Vizier, pull yourself together and see if you can devise something that will make me laugh as I have never laughed before."

"O Sublime One!" murmured Boobeejee, "whose voice is as the voice of the Gods, whose frown is muttering thunder, and whose smile is like sunshine after the rainy season. O Elephant-Faced-One! King of Kings, whose . . ."

"Expunge," roared the King, "and get to the point!"

"Alas! dread Monarch, I have no suitable suggestion to offer your Majesty. When, some time ago, I hinted that mice let loose in the Imperial Harem might cause you merriment, my pleasantry was treated with scorn, and a considerable sum was deducted from my salary. You will see, Great Essence of Wisdom, that my position at Court is a somewhat delicate one, and I am chary of offering advice that is more than likely to meet with your disapproval."

The King, having thrust a royal finger into the ribs of the portly Grand Vizier, said: "Bid the Court assemble, including the dancing-girls, and let us see if anyone can suggest a plan for my delectation."

So the Grand Vizier issued his orders, and in due time the throne-room was filled with a mighty

company of men and women. There was a low murmur of voices, the tinkling sound of instruments, and everywhere a display of jewels and costly robes.

"Now," said the King, "I have reached that state of boredom when it is absolutely necessary that I should laugh. Unless I laugh before the passing of many moons, I am in danger of falling into a decline. Let the wailing I hear be more hearty and the tears I see more profuse, for verily if I yield up the ghost for want of a good joke, there will be none to rule over you with the same beneficence you now enjoy. He or she who can remove depression from my throne will receive a fitting reward as well as the gratitude of all loyal subjects who would fain postpone the splendour of my obsequies till a more fit season."

For a few moments the courtiers whispered together, shook their heads, and then lapsed into silence.

"Have I a set of idiots gathered about me?" thundered the King. "Have I nursed in my royal bosom a number of tongued-tied nincompoops? Is no one going to speak? Have you all, from the plump Grand Vizier downwards, lost your sense of humour? Make haste to find it, you ease-loving puppets, for humour is the most precious gift in the world."

Presently Mumtaz, the dancing-girl, approached the throne and prostrated herself. "O King," she said, "have I leave to make known my plan whereby you shall laugh till you almost split your incomparable sides?"

"Proceed, woman," replied the King. "You have a pretty face, a musical voice, and I doubt not a ready wit as well."

"Your Majesty," said Muntaz, "on a hill near our city dwells a holy man by the name of Rajputana, and so great is his sanctity that he claims to be proof against all temptation. For many years he has stood on his head and derived sustenance from the air and half a millet seed. His curses are sufficiently powerful to make a lion run away, a tree wither, and a grasshopper hop backwards. He has built up a high mountain of merit, and it is said that even the Gods grow jealous of his exceeding holiness. What think you, O King, if I bring Rajputana to Court as my husband, he who has been impervious to the wiles of women and even the enchantments of Apsaras?"

"Delightful!" said the King, laughing.

"Most superb!" murmured the Grand Vizier.

"And the reward for your handmaid?" inquired Muntaz.

"Anything you please," replied the King, "even if it be half of my kingdom."

"I beg leave to censor this ignoble plan," said the Lord Chamberlain, rising and breaking away from many restraining hands. "It is not befitting the dignity of our King that he should approve what may be the ruination of a most estimable ascetic. My only comfort is that when a man stands on his head

he is less likely to have it turned by the fascination of a pretty woman. I am well aware that, having given voice to my opinion, I am in danger of losing my life . . .”

“You will!” said the King curtly. And the Lord Chamberlain, trying in vain to catch the eye of the Grand Vizier, was speedily removed and handed over to the Chief Executioner.

II

Many months later, and at a time when the King was playing chess with his grandmother, a herald approached his Majesty, saying : “Mumtaz and a strange-looking man approach the city.”

“Ha ! Ha ! grandmother,” remarked the King, “we shall listen to a merry tale to-night. Where is the Grand Vizier ? He always contrives to absent himself just when his services are required. Go, herald, and bid him pluck up his robe and hasten toward me.”

Presently the Grand Vizier came running into the apartment. “What ails the King ?” he said, gasping for breath, his face red and moist from exertion.

“Make preparations for the reception of Mumtaz and her husband,” said the King. “Send forth the elephants, and see that they are fittingly caparisoned. Let the drums sound and the horns be blown

lustily in welcome. Bid the Court assemble to-night in the throne-room, and look to it that the apartment be well strewn with the best roses procurable. Command the confectioners to send up their most entrancing sweetmeats, and proclaim from the housetops, in your most ear-splitting voice, the coming of Mumtaz and the narration of her story."

"Your Majesty," stammered the Grand Vizier, "the royal treasury has become somewhat depleted of late owing to the building of five new palaces. The expenses incurred during our recent war have yet to be met, and . . ."

"Enough," shouted the King, "or by the one-eyed cow of the Temple of Lantock you shall be made to suffer for your untimely revelations!"

"Most gracious King," said the Grand Vizier, "I hasten to obey your commands," and with a low bow Boobeejee retired from his Majesty's presence.

When the evening came the King sat on his ivory throne caressing the now lovely Fatima, while his courtiers, laughing and talking, reclined on a thick carpet of fragrant roses.

Presently Mumtaz, apparelled in a network of jewels, advanced toward the throne and made a low obeisance.

"Where is your husband?" inquired the King.

"He awaits without, your Majesty, and craves that you will graciously pardon him for not appearing before you until I have told my story."

“Very well,” said the King. “He shall be brought in later. Let the music cease, and let Mumtaz begin her tale.”

“Your Majesty,” commenced the dancing-girl, “when I reached the summit of a hill that is called the Hill of the Blue Tree-tops, I saw two emaciated legs rising before me that seemed little more than shin- and thigh-bones. They were the legs of the most holy Rajputana.

“At length I drew close to the ascetic and sat down. I observed that he was purple in the face, that his hair was long and matted, and that his poor body had been blistered by the sun. He was mumbling and groaning, and gradually I perceived that he was pouring forth a diatribe against women.

“‘Most worthy Rajputana,’ I said sweetly, ‘wherefore this bitter denunciation of women? Had it not been for your mother you would not be now standing on your head and hourly attaining greater holiness. I come for wisdom and not foolishness, for peace and not bitterness of heart.’

“‘You come,’ snapped the holy man, ‘in the spirit of levity. I perceive wickedness in your heart, and, lest I open the vials of my wrath, I advise you to hasten your departure. Know you not that I have for many years stood on my head, that with the rattling of these skulls on my chest and with the repetition of certain ancient incantations I can perform really excellent miracles? Know you not that

I have but lately received a deputation from the Gods begging me to renounce my austerities lest I should rival the immortals and lay siege to Heaven itself?'

"Then I made answer: 'Why do you stand on your head and leave your poor little feet in the air at the mercy of the sun and rain and cutting wind?'

"'I have no use for my head,' replied the holy man, 'except as a prop. It is impossible to have brains and to seek enlightenment from the Gods at the same time. When I walked on my feet I doubted many things. I saw many things that I did not want to see; but now, having reversed my miserable body, I perceive not the wretched world of mortals, but contemplate the most profound mysteries of another existence.'

"Then, O King, I was filled with an irresistible desire to tickle the feet of this foolish man. I picked up a feather, and made it go tickle, tickle, tickle across the soles of Rajputana's feet. He cursed, and rain descended. He cursed again, and devils came from the ground and leered at me. But in spite of these terrors I went on tickling the feet of this ascetic. Presently he cried with a loud voice: 'Have mercy, woman, have mercy! Drop your feather, or in my agony I shall be forced to yield up the ghost.'

"'Very well,' I made answer, 'but bear in mind that when I come to see you to-morrow I will have none of your curses. If you attempt to call down

vengeance upon me, I will assuredly tickle your feet again.'

"'O woman,' replied Rajputana, 'on the morrow you will find me sweet of temper, a gentle and lovable saint who desires only your happiness.'

"I went down from the Hill of the Blue Tree-tops well satisfied, for a ticklish man, whether he be holy or otherwise, is far from being impervious to the wiles of a woman."

"Ah! Mumtaz," said the King, "even the soul of a holy man can be tickled by a feather," and his Majesty laughed, while his courtiers found it expedient to laugh no less heartily.

"The next morning," continued the dancing-girl, "as I approached Rajputana, I saw his toes curl at my presence. 'Holy man,' I said, 'how many years have you stood on your head?'

"'Twenty beneficent years.'

"'How long will you continue to stand on your head?'

"'Another twenty years.'

"Then, O King, I went behind Rajputana, and pushed him with all my might, crying: 'No you won't holy man! No, you won't!' How I rocked with laughter as I saw him rolling down the hill till he was stopped by a clump of bushes.

"Rajputana lay still for a long time, and I grew afraid lest I should have killed him; but presently he stirred, put his hands to his head,

and slowly climbed up the hill. 'Miserable woman,' he said, you have upset me more than I can say! By your wickedness you have set at naught my years of austerity. You have made a shameful mockery of one of the choicest saints who ever lived. You have had the wanton impudence to set me on my feet, like common mortals, when my desire is to stand on my head and finally attain a degree of holiness second to none among the most exalted of our Gods. Vile creature! Too late have I plumbed the wickedness of your heart, but it is not too late for a vengeance so complete and so awful . . .'

"The holy man was about to pour forth a most terrible curse when I held up the feather and shook it in his face, saying: 'Peace, Rajputana, peace. Is your memory so poor that you have forgotten the way I tickled you yesterday?'

"No sooner had I uttered these words than he began to weep and to beg for mercy. 'No, no, anything but that, anything but that!' he murmured, almost beside himself.

" 'Rajputana,' I said, 'Let us be good friends and not quarrel with each other. The blood that has too freely collected in your head will doubtless subside presently. Tell me, is it not good to see the world the right way up again, and tell me, is it not somewhat pleasant to see a woman the right way up too?'

“The holy man groaned exceedingly. ‘I beseech you,’ he said, ‘to set me on my head again, and when you marry your son shall become the Grand Vizier.’”

The King laughed. “What think you, Boobeejee, of that little prophecy?”

“Allowances must be made, your Majesty, for the addled condition of Rajputana’s brain,” replied the the Grand Vizier, turning pale notwithstanding.

“We shall see,” said the King. “And now, Mumtaz, proceed with the story.”

“O King,” continued the dancing-girl, “my heart was touched by the pitiable condition of the holy man. I brought him choice food and set it before him. At first he would not eat. He sat rocking himself to and fro, racked with pain. Presently he took a mouthful of a sweet confection, and when he had done so, I observed a smile as he fixed his eyes upon me.

“‘Woman,’ he said, ‘I certainly see things differently now. It is true that I can no longer observe the Gods making merry in the sky, but sitting before me is one whose loveliness is surely not to be surpassed, and I am well content.’

“Perceiving, O King, that Rajputana was forgetting his holy ways a little too quickly, and fearing that he might soon become importunate, I asked him to rub ointment on his sores and bade him farewell until the morrow.

"The next day, while climbing the Hill of the Blue Tree-tops, I met some pilgrims coming in the opposite direction, talking eagerly together. When I reached them, one of their company thus addressed me: 'It is useless to continue your journey. Rajputana is no longer standing on his head and is therefore no longer holy. He is a humbug and a rascal. He has actually washed himself, cut his hair and beard, and looks as if he has had a good meal.' But I only laughed at the words of these pilgrims, and proceeded on my way.

"'Welcome! Yea, a very harvest of welcomes!' exclaimed Rajputana when I reached the summit of the hill. 'I have just had an altercation with a few pilgrims. They went so far as to abuse me just now because I was not standing on my head. I have, however, put aside all austerities and bask in the sunshine of your presence, and in so doing I am recompensed a thousandfold. I pray you tell me your name.'

"When I told him my name and that I was a dancing-girl of the King, he said something about kings in general and you in particular that would not make you laugh. Seeing, however, that I did not approve of his views, and glancing hastily at a feather I held in my hand, he immediately changed the subject.

"I must confess, O King, that remembering that Rajputana had for many years been a topsy-turvy holy man, he was remarkably apt and rapid in his

wooing, for while we were sitting together, he observed with a sigh: 'I am filled with an unutterable longing, Mumtaz, an incomprehensible desire that seems to issue from the vicinity of my heart. My being is afire and possibly in blossom, and you, Mumtaz, are a part of the fire and the blossom, the desire and the longing. Your hair is darker than ebony. Like a pale pink rose is your cheek, a rose in the moonlight, and as for the red of your mouth, it puts to shame the glory of a poppy and a newly-opened pomegranate. Mumtaz, surely this sweet malady is love, and surely, seeing that you have given me a new life and set me on my feet to some purpose, we can but be made for each other as the cup for the acorn.'

"'Rajputana,' I made answer, 'you have assuredly fallen in love, but think you of the possible consequences. It is one thing to stand on your head and unravel sublime mysteries, but quite another thing to survive the worries of married life. You have been pleased to address me in flowery language. Have you considered the thorns that lurk beneath the petals?'

"'No,' said Rajputana with a smile, 'simply because they do not exist. So great is my love that I would even go to the Court of your King.'

"'That proves much, Rajputana. Would you come to Court, be the reason what it may?'

"'Yes,' he answered, 'but my Mumtaz can have no reason save that she is one of the dancing-girls of the King.'

"We were married, your Majesty, and lived in a forest hut together. When the green of summer changed to the glowing fires of autumn, I realised that I must return to Court and bring my husband with me.

"So it came to pass, O King, that we set out together, and when Rajputana saw the procession of gorgeously-apparelled elephants, and heard the music and shouting of many people, he said: 'Wherefore these gay scenes?' I was about to evade the question when we heard the loud voice of the Grand Vizier shouting from a house-top: 'Behold, Mumtaz, the dancing-girl, draws nigh with her holy man of a husband, and to-night at Court will she tell the funny story of his undoing!'

"When Rajputana heard these words he became exceedingly angry. 'What trickery is this?' he shouted. 'Am I to be made a laughing-stock? Mumtaz, you have grievously deceived me. It is one thing to fall in one's own estimation, quite another to fall in the estimation of an over-fed king and his miserable courtiers.'

"At length I managed to soothe my angry husband by telling him that the Grand Vizier had recently had a stroke and was addicted to shouting nonsense from the house-tops.

"Only for a little while was Rajputana satisfied. Outside the Palace gates he stopped. 'You have lied,' he said hotly. 'You have, for a reason I know not,

tried to make an exhibition of me. I refuse to enter the Palace, and will await you here.' "

"O Mumtaz," said the King, laughing heartily, "surely when your angry lord stood outside the Palace gates there was need for you to tickle him with your feather!" Then, turning to attendants, he bade them go and bring in Rajputana.

Presently the attendants returned and announced that Rajputana was nowhere to be found.

At this the King laughed more merrily than ever, and said: "Let some one ride with all speed to the Hill of the Blue Tree-tops. Why, Mumtaz, the laughter is not all on your side, but you have fulfilled your part of the bargain, and now I will fulfil mine."

"O King," replied Mumtaz, "wait till your messenger returns, then will I crave my reward."

His Majesty nodded assent, caressed Fatima's cheek, and questioned her concerning many points of the story, while the courtiers laughed and jested.

"What is that sound?" said the King, suddenly rising from his throne.

"That is the laughter of your subjects without the Palace gates," murmured the Grand Vizier.

No sooner had Boobeejee spoken than the golden doors opposite the throne were opened, and an attendant came in holding his sides and doubled up with laughter.

"Speak!" thundered the King. "Have you found Rajputana?"

"Your Majesty, Rajputana is now standing on his head on the Hill of the Blue Tree-tops."

"Mumtaz," observed the King, "go forth and tickle his feet and he will come back again!"

"Great Monarch," said the attendant, "the feet of Rajputana are covered with many palm-leaves sewn together!"

"Mumtaz," whispered the King, scarcely able to speak for laughing, "draw hither. Now tell me what you wish for a reward."

"Your Majesty," said the dancing-girl, "for reward let Rajputana continue to stand on his head . . . and . . . and, O King, if I should give birth to a son, make him Grand Vizier."

THE MASTER

I

ONE sunny morning in April, London had a surprise. It came at a time when our Army on the Western front was undergoing an ordeal more bitter, more significant, than the retreat from Mons, at a time when the pessimist cried : "Too late !" and the optimist was silent.

The surprise was not the sudden cessation of hostilities. It was an extraordinary and mysterious advertisement.

When Londoners looked at the first sheet of their morning newspapers they blinked and rubbed their eyes. They uttered various kinds of exclamations, for printed in large capital letters in the centre of the page were these words :

THE MASTER IS COMING TO LONDON

Old gentlemen in suburban trains that jerked their way to the city leant forward between the jerks and said : "Have you seen——?" It was invariably a half-finished sentence, for there was no need

to finish it, since the party questioned interrupted with : " Oh, yes ! You mean the mysterious advertisement, 'The Master is coming to London'." Then followed a discussion on the subject, and various theories were advanced as to what the announcement meant.

In London clubs the same theme occupied the attention of bald-headed members who, not having much to do and a good deal of time to do it in, talked more about the Master than anyone else.

Fleet Street was surprised, puzzled, delighted. Journalists scented " copy ". They were out to make a hit, and to be the first to make a hit for the papers they represented. Telephone wires bore such questions as the following : " Who's the Master ? " " When's he coming ? " " Who was responsible for the advertisement ? "

In a Somersetshire village an obscure curate read the message over and over again, a glow of rapture on his face.

" This is indeed good news," he said to his daughter Evangeline. " The best news we have had for a long time. I know exactly what it means. It means," and he leant forward eagerly, " it means that Christ is coming into the world again."

" Oh, father ! " exclaimed Evangeline, " don't let the Bishop hear such views. Surely it is almost profane to speak in such a way. I am quite sure Christ would not advertise in the newspapers where

there is betting news and accounts of murders and divorce proceedings."

The Rev. Thomas When smiled. "The Press to-day," he said, "is one of the most potent and far-reaching influences we have. It moulds and directs public opinion. It is true that newspapers contain references to human depravity, but they also contain much that reflects the goodness and bravery of men and women . . . When the Master comes He will bring peace."

When the evening papers appeared they all contained a leader devoted to the announcement which had so startled London in the morning. But not one of the leader writers was able to explain the mystery. Indeed, the story they had to tell tended to make the matter more inexplicable. One journalist wrote as follows :

"We regret to say that, after a most thorough investigation, we are unable to throw light upon the mysterious message which appeared on the first page of all our London daily newspapers this morning. Incredible as it may seem, the advertisement appeared without the knowledge of anyone connected directly or indirectly with these papers. Last night the London dailies went to press with the make-up as usual. When, during the early hours of the morning, the journals were distributed by train and motor throughout the country, they contained no reference to this remarkable advertisement. This

point is proved by many reliable witnesses. In some mysterious way, probably during transit, the news items, illustrations, or advertisements on the first page were obliterated, and in their place appeared: 'THE MASTER IS COMING TO LONDON.' The whole affair is so mysterious that the practical man, who leaves the supernatural out of his reckoning, is completely dumb-founded. That some person or persons could have obliterated the printer's ink on the first page of our contemporaries, and substituted the message which has electrified London, is unthinkable. There is only one alternative—we submit it with much reluctance—and that is that a miracle has taken place."

The little curate in a remote Somersetshire village had not read an evening paper. He could not afford to buy evening papers. He went to bed that night radiantly happy. Yesterday it seemed that his labour had been in vain. That night he knew life to be worth while.

"The Master," he murmured. "Love is coming into the world again, and love can do all."

London was mystified, credulous and incredulous by turn: feverishly excited, apathetic, restless; but Mr. Wren, out of the fullness of a simple and unselfish life, understood. "Oh, the glory of it all!" he exclaimed, looking up at Leonardo's lovely head of Christ. "The Master is coming to London."

Mr. Wren came to London, and he came to London for precisely the same reason the Magi came to Bethlehem. He did not bring gold and frankincense and myrrh. He brought a dilapidated portmanteau, and an old umbrella which Evangeline had neatly stitched on more than one occasion.

Mr. Wren had not been to London for many years. The noise and activity bewildered him.

He found himself standing on an escalator leading to one of the tubes, saw a notice at the bottom, and stepped off with the wrong foot. He had not been in a tube before. He was familiar with the old Underground in the days when it was associated with strong sulphurous fumes. Now he found himself hanging on to a strap, swaying this way and that as he peered down a brightly-lit car. As he walked along apparently interminable passages he realised that sulphurous fumes were no longer existent, but that a strong, warm wind had taken their place. It blew out his shabby overcoat and set his clerical hat at a rakish angle.

He left the tube at Piccadilly Circus and stood by the Criterion, hesitating. The ceaseless traffic appalled him. He wanted to cross the Circus, but it seemed almost suicidal to do so. As he stood there he noticed the Frivolity and a concourse of people waiting outside. Across that place of amusement he

read the word "Pandova". Now there would have been nothing in the Frivolity to interest Mr. Wren, had he not also observed a striking poster representing Pandova in scanty dress, and in large capital letters beneath it: "THE MASTER HAS COME TO LONDON."

Mr. Wren put down his portmanteau and stared hard at the Frivolity.

"'The Master has come to London,'" said Mr. Wren. "'The Master a music-hall star? Impossible!'"

A kind-hearted policeman came up to Mr. Wren. "Beg your pardon, sir," he said, "but do you want to get to the other side of the Circus? Seen you standing there for some time, a bit bewildered like."

"Y-es," replied Mr. Wren jerkily, "but if you can spare me a moment or two I should like to ask you a question. Who is Pandova?"

The policeman laughed good-humouredly. "Haven't you 'eard of Pandova? 'E's a great dancer and singer, sir. Never been anything like it before. London's mad about 'im. You oughter be inside the Friv. when 'e comes on. The people nearly break their 'ands clapping 'im, and shout theirselves 'oarse, they do. And the women seem to lose control of theirselves. No, I won't tell you, sir. All I say is that if my missus was to see 'im I'd 'ave to cook me own nose-bag for the rest of me nat'ral, because she'd never come back again!"

“Indeed?” said Mr. Wren. “One more question, constable. I see written on the Pandova poster, ‘The Master has come to London’. What does it mean?”

“Ah!” exclaimed the policeman, squeezing beefy fingers into his belt, “there you’ve got me. There you’ve got everybody in London, as I may say. A few days ago there was a hextra-hordinary advertisement on the first page of the London papers. ’Twas ‘The Master is coming to London,’ and ’t was printed so large as life. There’s many people wot connects Pandova with the advertisement.”

“Then Pandova has only just come to London?”

“Only just come, sir, and wot’s more ’e won’t be ’ere long.”

“Why?”

The policeman leant forward, and in a burst of confidence extended a large hand close to the curate’s ear. “*Because*,” he whispered, “’e’s *un’ing the morals of the public!*”

“Thank you,” said Mr. Wren, sadly agitated. “Perhaps you will now be so good as to conduct me safely through the traffic. I thought if I ran——”

“Better not run, sir. Just follow me. You’ll be all right, sir. Up from the country? Ah! I thought so. Bit more lively up here, sir, ain’t it? Nothing to be ashamed of. Why, I’ve ’ad to take Tommies over before now. All of a tremble they was. Shell shock done it.”

As these remarks were made while the curate was timidly crossing the Circus in the wake of the broad-shouldered policeman, Mr. Wren could not reply immediately, but when he found himself standing outside Swan and Edgar's he said, "Thank God!" and "Quite so!"

"Where do you want to go, sir?" inquired the policeman. "Angel, Islington?"

Mr. Wren gave him the address of a boarding-house in Bloomsbury, and a few minutes later the curate was being whirled along in a motor 'bus.

III

"I'll do it!" said Mr. Wren next morning, while he was shaving. "I'll see Pandova. I'll judge for myself."

Shortly after breakfast Mr. Wren left the Bloomsbury boarding-house with a packet of sandwiches, a camp-stool and his ever faithful umbrella. Into his coat-pocket he had slipped three books, *The Imitation of Christ*, *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, and *The Tempest*. The latter volume Evangeline had given him on his last birthday. Mr. Wren warmly endorsed Dumas' remark that, after God, Shakespeare had created most, and, far from being a desultory reader, he rightly considered *The Tempest* to be Shakespeare's finest and most mature play.

Mr. Wren reached the Frivolity shortly before ten o'clock. Already there was a long queue outside the pit entrance.

The curate put on his spectacles, opened out his camp-stool, and sat down. He looked about him with considerable interest. There was so much to see. He wondered what the tip-toeing Mercury thought of it all. He was safe from the roaring traffic as were the women sitting on the island beneath, with their brightly-filled baskets of flowers. Mr. Wren listened to a blind man playing a violin. He watched with amazement an aged impersonator of well-known celebrities.

A woman came round selling picture post-cards of the famous Pandova. Mr. Wren bought one.

"Sell like hot cakes," said the woman. "Can't get enough of 'em."

"Have you seen Pandova?"

"Not I. He's the very devil!"

"Then he's not the Master?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, I mean he's not——"

At that moment the woman was called away. He heard her piping in a shrill voice: "Picture post-cards of the great Pandova. Real photographs. Twopence each."

The curate sat looking at the photograph. A girl leant over his shoulder. "Handsome, isn't he?" she said eagerly.

Mr. Wren moved his stool a fraction of an inch.

"Yes, I suppose so," he said coldly.

"You ought to see his hands," continued the girl. "Such beautiful hands, and his chest. It's as smooth as satin, as white as snow. But what I am particularly mad on is his legs——."

"Thank you," said Mr. Wren, turning sharply round and looking the girl straight in the face, "I don't wish to hear any more."

Mr. Wren hastily thrust the photo of Pandova into his pocket, took out *The Imitation of Christ*, and began to read, but the print was blurred. There were tears in the curate's eyes.

Presently Mr. Wren closed the book. He felt keenly disappointed, not with A Kempis' immortal pages, but because the Master had not yet come to London. The man Pandova was not Christ, but Anti-Christ. Mr. Wren asked himself whether or not he was justified in remaining in the queue. He had serious thoughts of going away. Then it occurred to him that if the friendly policeman he had met the day before had not exaggerated, it was his duty to see for himself one who was a pernicious influence in London, one it was his business to denounce whole-heartedly, even if he stood alone in his denunciation. There were people he knew who would misconstrue his motives. Nothing mattered so long as he was loyal to the Master, and to strike a blow for Him, be the blow ever so feeble, was a joy indeed.

The day dragged on slowly, and at four o'clock Mr. Wren was glad to avail himself of the services of a small boy who took his place for an hour. It gave him an opportunity of stretching his legs and getting tea at one of those luxurious places of refreshment known as an A. B. C.

When Mr. Wren was again seated on his camp-stool the friendly policeman came up to him.

"Thought it was you, sir," he said pleasantly. "So you're going to see 'im? There will be dirty work at the cross-roads to-night!"

Some one laughed.

"I don't quite follow you."

"You will!" replied the policeman moving away with a prodigious wink.

"The doors are open!" said some one. The queue surged forward, and in the intense excitement that followed Mr. Wren, gripping his umbrella and camp-stool firmly, found himself considerably jostled. At the pay box a metal disc was thrust towards him. A few moments later he occupied an excellent seat in the pit. On his left sat the girl who had spoken to him in such an immodest manner. She was rubbing her opera-glasses with a minute handkerchief. Having finished this operation she raised the glasses to her eyes, adjusted the screw, and gazed intently at the drop curtain.

"That 'll take in everything from here," she said in an excited whisper, "his beautiful hands and chest

and legs—everything! Golly! I wish I was sitting in one of those stalls in the front row. I'd jump right on to the stage from there—and hug him!"

Mr. Wren made no reply. He was looking at the fashionable women as they thronged into the stalls. Their dresses amazed and disgusted him. He had thought Evangeline's evening dress a little daring because it displayed in a tight V a minute portion of her neck; but Evangeline's dress was not a bit like the dresses he saw now. They were shimmering creations which the curate thought must have cost as much as five pounds, but which actually cost in many cases more than his annual stipend. So much for so little. Eve with her fig-leaf seemed to be more respectably dressed than these wealthy women.

"And there's a war on!" said Mr. Wren hotly.

"What's that?" inquired the girl.

"I said 'there's a war on'."

"Oh, yes! Out there on the other side, but we don't think about those things here!"

Mr. Wren glowed with indignation, began to speak, then stopped abruptly. He stopped speaking because he was conscious at that moment of a strange kind of restlessness which seemed to pervade the whole audience. He was conscious of a powerful exotic perfume which came over him in hot waves. It stifled him, made his head ache. Evangeline never used perfumes of that kind. All she used was lavender water, and that sparingly. The restlessness

increased. Mr. Wren saw the curtain pressed back an inch or two and some one look out. He could not see who it was, but as he looked his heart began to beat rapidly. He felt his cheeks burn, his restlessness increase. Some one, sinister, foul, was standing behind the curtain, some one possessed with an appalling influence for evil.

Mr. Wren wondered if this sordid kind of feeling, this animal excitement, was peculiar to theatres. He had never been in a theatre before. He had seen two plays, *The Sign of the Cross* and *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. Both had been produced in a town hall. He had gone to see the first-mentioned play because it had received the approbation of Mr. Gladstone, and he had seen *Little Lord Fauntleroy* because he had given away several copies of the book as Sunday-school prizes.

"Excuse me," said Mr. Wren, turning to the girl on his left, "is this feverish excitement usual in a theatre?"

"Lord, no! When Pavlova and Nijinsky and Mordkin were in London they made their audiences wildly excited, and so did Gaby and the Sicilian players, but it was nothing like this, nothing like it at all. When Pandova comes on I feel as if I have just drunk a bottle of champagne. Merry and bright, glad eye, you know, and all that sort of thing!"

"Anything else?" inquired Mr. Wren nervously. "Don't you feel now, at this moment, that something horrible is about to happen?"

"Oh, no!" said the girl frankly, dabbing her face with a small powder-puff. "I just feel deliciously wicked, that's all!"

"No feeling of shame?"

"None whatever."

Mr. Wren relapsed into silence.

The orchestra struck up the overture and succeeded in drowning occasionally the buzz of conversation.

The curtain rose and revealed the first scene of an Eastern revue, a scene of such bewildering magnificence that Mr. Wren positively gasped. The *Arabian Nights* seemed shoddy, almost colourless, in comparison, though Mr. Wren had only read an expurgated edition, ironed and starched out of all recognition of the original, and strictly intended for the family circle.

"Fine, isn't it?" said the girl, smiling at Mr. Wren's dumbfounded expression. "Knocks out *Chu Chin Chow* and *Kismet*, *Sumerun* and *The Miracle*. Leaves them streets behind."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Pandova will be coming presently," said the girl, her voice shaking with excitement. "You'll see him in about ten minutes."

When the curtain rose for the second time that evening there was tremendous applause. There were also cat-calls and whistling.

"What's that?" inquired Mr. Wren.

"What?" said the girl.

"Those whistling noises."

“ Oh, they come from the gods, the people up in the gallery, you know. The people who suck oranges because its cheaper to suck oranges than to suck chocolates—. We’re looking at a temple garden. In a minute or two you’ll see the inside of the temple where Pandova is.”

True enough the garden scene suddenly disappeared, and Mr. Wren found himself looking at the interior of an Indian temple. It was so dimly lit that at first he could see nothing but blurred masses ; then gradually he saw a pyramidal heap of golden figures, figures nude and semi-nude in all sorts of fantastic attitudes. Lust was written large in every undulating curve, in figures of deities that revelled in phallic worship. He noticed too, strange reptiles and animals and flowers. In the centre of this conglomeration of lascivious deities he saw Pandova. He was sitting cross-legged on a golden lotus. His eyes were closed. He sat as one long dead, his figure as immovable as the figures about him.

The girl was looking through her opera-glasses, her body bent forward. Suddenly she thrust out her hand and squeezed Mr. Wren’s arm. She squeezed it hard.

“ Guess what I’m looking at ? ”

“ Pandova,” replied Mr. Wren.

“ Of course, silly ! Who else should I look at ? Pandova, certainly, but what part of him ? ”

Mr. Wren made no reply.

"You'll never guess," she said, laughing, "but I bet hundreds of other people are looking just where I am looking now!"

"I wish you wouldn't squeeze my arm," said Mr. Wren. "I think you forget yourself."

"I came here to forget myself—look!"

At that moment a group of gorgeously-apparelled priests and priestesses entered the temple. There was a soft sound of music, music of tinkling bells and tom-toms. The High Priest prostrated himself and offered up a kind of prayer in a high-pitched, monotonous voice. The pyramidal mass of golden figures began to move with the slow, slimy movement of a lazy crocodile climbing up on a sandbank in the Nile. The movement gradually increased until it became almost frenzied. The central deity, Pandova, opened his eyes and smiled. There was a roar of thunder, a dazzling flash of lightning, momentary darkness. In that moment of darkness the pyramidal mass of deities, the priests and priestesses, disappeared, and Pandova was dancing in a transparent robe of gold.

Pandova was certainly handsome, god-like in appearance, but his beauty was feminine. His dancing was wonderful. It had the grace and the swiftness of a darting swallow, the fluttering movement of a wind-blown blossom, the glory of sunbeams shining on water. All this Mr. Wren readily conceded. But that was not all. The

longer he looked at Pandova the more strongly grew a feeling of repugnance, disgust, loathing. Pandova's smile only half concealed a leer. Those lithe, exquisitely shaped limbs of his seemed to be part of some lewd orgie, like the orgies associated with the Saturnalia of ancient Rome. The technique was perfect, the setting beautiful, but the *motif* was diabolically evil.

Pandova began to sing as well as dance. He sang one of the love poems of Hafiz. The Sirens must have sung as Pandova was singing then. It was so alluring, so gentle, so compact of tears and laughter. The sound, sweet as a thrush's note, seemed to come, not from a stage, but from a deep blue sea, a dream sea flashing in an April shower. But always Mr. Wren saw the leer behind the smile, and heard in that bird-clear singing a note that beckoned, called the listener to destruction.

Suddenly Pandova stopped singing and dancing. He stretched out his arms, and his filmy robe of gold fell from him.

Mr. Wren heard the girl on his left breathing hard. He saw her rise from her seat, and was about to restrain her when the whole house rose. It seemed in that moment that civilisation had suddenly vanished and that life in the jungle had taken its place.

There was a violent rush towards the stage. Women were laughing, shouting, singing, their hair down, their dresses torn. Men seized them and

hugged them close against stiff, gleaming shirt fronts. One woman, uttering a fearful shriek, flung herself from the dress-circle into the pit beneath.

Women tore themselves away from amorous male strangers and surged nearer and nearer the stage where Pandova stood. Who would have a man when a god awaited them?

"I protest," shouted Mr. Wren, swayed this way and that, "I protest in the Name of the Master. We are fighting in France. The boys are going down in thousands. Such a little divides us from defeat. They are fighting for liberty, for the very breath of old England. If they knew that they were fighting for men and women who have become foul as swine: if they knew that Pandova is Anti-Christ——"

Some one struck Mr. Wren a heavy blow with a chair. For a moment he heard a buzzing in his ears, and seemed to be swimming in a torrent of blood. Then Walpurgis Night faded away and the little curate knew no more.

IV

When Mr. Wren opened his eyes, it was to pass from oblivion to acute pain. The pain was excruciating, and he closed his eyes again with a dull moan.

He heard some one laugh, some one say "Golly!" The laughter was familiar, and he had some vague

recollection of having heard the word "Golly" before. His brain struggled to give personal significance to those sounds, but a fly rushing about in swift straight lines in the middle of the room could not have been less successful. His brain seemed to be a cog-wheel. He had no sooner started it going—and with infinite difficulty—than it stopped with a sharp jerk. He struggled again and again. Presently he fell into a peaceful slumber.

A few hours later Mr. Wren stirred, woke up. The pain was now less acute, and he looked about the room. He noticed a bowl of white lilac and medicine bottles by his bedside, pictures that did not depict sacred subjects, a dressing-table littered with various toilet articles, and last of all he saw a young woman sitting in a wicker chair.

"Thank you," she said looking up. "I was wondering when you were going to see me."

Mr. Wren stared at her. "Who are you? This room. This pain. I don't understand."

"There are a lot of things you don't understand. Now be a good boy and don't talk. Leave the talking to me. A woman can talk more and mean less than any man that ever lived. I'm just going to get your tea."

Had Mr. Wren been more alert he would have noticed a tender and wistful look in the girl's eyes as she left the room.

When she came in again, she placed a tea-tray on a small table.

"Can you sit up a little?" she said. "Just hold on to me. That's right. Now the pillows so, and so. Splendid. Never mind your poor old head. It's not a bit of good to you at present. Here's your tea—hot buttered toast with the crust off."

Mr. Wren shook his head.

"Oh, but you must!"

The little curate continued to shake his head.

"See," said the girl, laughing, "I'm going to feed you just as if you were a wicked child that had made an awful vow to hunger-strike."

She sat down on the bed and cut the buttered toast into small pieces.

"Now," she said, "open your mouth."

Mr. Wren obeyed.

"Don't bite my finger off, will you? Chu Chin, my cat, doesn't when I feed him, and you mustn't either."

"No," replied Mr. Wren gravely, "I won't do that."

"You're leading quite a hand-to-mouth existence, aren't you?" said the girl, as the last piece of toast disappeared.

Mr. Wren nodded.

"If I find you've lost your sense of humour as well as your memory, I'll never forgive you. I knew an old lady who read *Punch* for many years, and it never made her laugh or even smile."

"Then why did she read it?" inquired Mr. Wren.

"Because *Punch* is a national institution, like Pears' soap and going to church on Sunday morning."

The tea things cleared away, the girl sat down in the wicker chair and opened a book. But she was not reading. She was furtively looking at Mr. Wren. Presently she glanced at the clock.

"I must go out now," she said.

"Shopping?"

"No—work. I haven't been able to go for some time."

"Why?"

"Because you were more trouble than half a dozen babies. Now that you can talk without asking Dante if he would like the loan of your umbrella and similar bosh, you're only about as troublesome as five babies. Mrs. Scrubbs will do everything for you till I come back."

At the bedside she paused. "If you were asleep and didn't know," she said, "I'd kiss you just for the joy of knowing that you are going to get well again."

Before Mr. Wren could say anything the girl had left the room and gently shut the door.

"What a child!" exclaimed Mr. Wren.

"What a dear old baby!" said the girl as she went downstairs.

A little later Mr. Wren was aware of a bumping sound, of loud imprecations and spasmodic breathing. Then something heavy fell with a crash just outside the room, and some one tapped on the door.

"Come in," said Mr. Wren, shaking violently, as if he expected the sudden appearance of a formidable dragon.

A stout, florid woman entered, her shiny black hair parted in the middle. Buttons, hooks, eyes and sundry tapes seemed impotent to keep her clothes together. They were all straining at their moorings. If a hair divides the true from the false, something still more slender divided Mrs. Scrubbs from decency and indecency. She was the kind of woman who should have worn well riveted girders.

Mr. Wren watched Mrs. Scrubbs with considerable apprehension. She carried a bucket of coal with sticks and newspaper laid on the top.

"What are you going to do?" inquired Mr. Wren.

"Light a fire, sir."

"What month is it?"

"June. You don't take no notice of the months, sir. They ain't nothing to go by in England. You gets snow in July, butterflies in December."

"Mrs. Scrubbs," began the curate, "I want to ask you a few questions."

"You can ask as many questions as you like, sir, but you wont get no answers out of me. I 'ad strict orders from Miss May, and it's as much as my job's worth to go against her wishes."

"Miss May what?"

"Miss May Flynn, the young lady wot's looked after you better than your own mother

could have done, better than I could have done myself."

Mr. Wren shuddered. Fancy Mrs. Scrubbs bending over him! With an effort he said: "Miss May's gone out, hasn't she?"

"Yes."

"Couldn't you have gone in her place?"

Mrs. Scrubbs sniffed. "No, I couldn't, me being a respectable woman married to the best policeman in London."

"Policeman, policeman? I used to know a London policeman—a long time ago. He escorted me across, across—why, yes, Piccadilly Circus! It's all coming back to me."

Mrs. Scrubbs, having laid the fire, applied a match. "If you weren't a parson," she said hotly, "I'd call you a blithering idiot to go and excite yourself when you've got more than one leg in the grave. We're here to-day, gone to-morrow—at least you will be if you aren't very careful!"

Mr. Wren had now no desire to talk. He lay back in bed with his eyes closed. He had closed his eyes because he had caught a glimpse of the lady of ample proportions bending forward and vigorously blowing the fire.

Sundry little explosions seemed inevitable, and at that moment he would have preferred a loud crash of thunder to the undoing of Mrs. Scrubbs.

Mrs. Scrubbs was unable to resist the temptation of giving Mr. Wren a parting shot as she left the room. "If I couldn't cross Piccadilly Circus better

than you," she said, with asperity, "I'd eat me 'at and stick it down in me ration book."

When the curate was left alone he was conscious of a pleasant sensation. A moment ago his memory had failed him. Now it was all coming back to him with a rush, still a little tangled and confused, but straightening itself out gradually. His visit to London; the weary wait outside the theatre; the girl who had spoken to him with such a lack of discretion; Pandova, and the tumultuous scene that followed.

A tabby cat, no other than Chu Chin, jumped on the bed. He had a pink nose and a white waistcoat. He walked with pride up to Mr. Wren's face and looked at him with considerable condescension, pressing his moist nose lightly against the curate's cheek. Apparently satisfied with his inspection, he began to turn round and round on Mr. Wren's chest, and, having made a hole for himself, settled down. A moment later he turned himself into a kind of furry ship by shooting out one of his back legs into a vertical position. Then he proceeded to wash a part of his body which was plump and speckled like the breast of a thrush. Suddenly he lowered his extended leg, complacently licked his right whiskers, then his left, blinked two or three times and closed his eyes. Chu Chin, having enjoyed a good meal and found a warm soft resting-place, was tremendously happy. He began to purr loudly and to knead with

his big velvety paws. When a cat purrs and kneads, it has reached the highest circle of the feline heaven.

Shortly before midnight May Flynn returned. The fire was still burning brightly, and she sat down in front of it, slowly taking off her hat. Mr. Wren watched her with ever-increasing excitement.

"Miss Flynn," he said, suddenly sitting up in bed, "it's all come back to me. You were with me at the theatre when Pandova—some one knocked me down, and then—"

"Look what you've done, Baby! You've disturbed His Serene Highness Chu Chin, direct descendant of the favourite cat of Amen-Ra. Chu Chin who has never eaten lights because he can see in the dark without them. Chu Chin who loves me more than anyone else and doesn't care how wicked I am because he's just as wicked himself, only he is wicked up among the chimney-pots and groaning cowls. He does his love-making high up on the roofs of houses, near the stars. He was so near the stars one night that he stood up on his hind legs and began to lap the Milky Way, so wonderfully clever is Chu Chin. Come here, Chu Chin."

Chu Chin gave Mr. Wren a withering look of utter contempt, jumped from the bed and sprang up on May's shoulder in his favourite position.

"Poor old Chu Chin. You thought Baby's chest was your throne, didn't you? You didn't know—"

"Some one knocked me down," repeated Mr. Wren, "and then—"

"And then I took you here, and looked after you a bit when you could not look after yourself."

"Evangeline," began Mr. Wren—

"Evangeline knows all about it. She doesn't like your being here, but the doctor said you were too ill to be moved, and so here you remained. Evangeline's staying in London. I expect she will come and see you to-morrow, or rather to-day, for it is now nearly one o'clock in the morning.

Mr. Wren was not slow to notice the way she spoke in referring to his daughter. He said quickly: "You don't like Evangeline, do you?"

"No, I don't!" said the girl, "but she'll go straight to Heaven when she dies, as a reward for not having found Heaven here!"

Mr. Wren winced. "If you are going to talk about Evangeline in that way, I don't want to listen to you. Evangeline is everything to me, everything."

"Yes, I know that," replied May, her eyes flashing with anger. "You kept on talking about her when you were delirious. You talked about her nearly as much as the Master."

"Yes, the Master comes first."

"Then Evangeline and your old umbrella and your books. Where do I come in?"

"I hardly know."

"You hardly know," the girl repeated doggedly, rubbing Chu Chin softly with her fingers just behind his left ear. "Do you know what I have been doing to-night, Baby?"

The curate shook his head.

"Would you like to know?"

"Yes."

"If you had said 'No' I would have told you. Now go to sleep and never, *never* dare to disturb Chu Chin again. Good night."

When Mr. Wren was breathing softly the girl tiptoed to his bedside and kissed him. Then she said softly: "If Evangeline knew I kissed you, she'd have umpteen fits. And if you knew, Baby, that I'm nothing but a common prostitute, you'd have umpteen fits too. But, Baby, it's been good to have you, to nurse you, to do things for you. You're not really a baby, you know. You're a strong, clean man who has the strength of his conviction. Chu Chin wouldn't have used your chest to sleep on unless he had taken a fancy to you. He spat at Evangeline and arched his back. Oh, Chu Chin is wonderfully discriminating, wonderfully correct in his judgment, but like me he is apt to show, rather than hide, his feelings. Chu Chin will certainly come to you again. When he does, sit very, very still, for hours and hours if need be, fully resolved that he and not you shall be the first to move."

She sat on his bed looking at him for a long time. Then she got up and went to her own room. She undressed in front of a long mirror and looked at the reflection intently. "I wonder," she said, "if Evangeline ever looks in a glass when she's taken off her clothes." Then she put on a dainty nightdress and jumped into bed.

"Baby," she said, "I wish, I wish—" Then she pulled the clothes over her head and sobbed bitterly.

Something furry crouched on the pillow and tried to thrust its head under the bedclothes.

"Come in, Chu Chin," said a pathetic little voice. And Chu Chin came in and kneaded her chest with his soft paws and gently licked her face. "I suppose it is not much to be loved by a cat," she said, "but it seems much to me because, Chu Chin, because no one else loves me. They buy me every night, Chu Chin, every night, but that is not love."

And Chu Chin seemed to understand. He rubbed his head against her cheek over and over again. Something wet and warm fell on his head, and there was paint and powder on his face.

V

Evangeline came to see her father. She came with her head thrown back a little, her kid-gloved hands tightly clenched. May Flynn had left them together.

She gave her father one of those pecks on the cheek reserved for members of a family. "Father," she said, "I have made arrangements for you to leave this house to-morrow. The young woman who has nursed you is anything but desirable. She says some most extraordinary things which no decent woman would ever say. She has no moral sense whatever, and is utterly and hopelessly degraded. It is humiliating that we should be under any obligation to such a woman. Just before I came in to see you Miss Flynn refused to take a penny for the expenses she has incurred on your behalf. She went further than that. She used strong and profane language."

"I think," said Mr. Wren, "you forget that Miss Flynn has been the means of saving my life. She has nursed me with a tenderness and devotion beyond all praise or thanks. So far from thinking, as you do, that she is utterly and hopelessly degraded, I consider it a privilege to know one who, however wayward and indiscreet, has a heart of gold and a soul near to the Kingdom."

Evangeline straightened her back and drew a long breath. "It is obvious, father, that you do not understand, or you would not speak of this woman in the way you do. It is hard to tell a man certain things, harder still when that man is your father."

"Evangeline," said Mr. Wren quietly, "you need not explain. I know."

" You know ? "

" Yes, I know."

Then Evangeline said things she had better have left unsaid. She was angry with her father, angry with "that prostitute person," as she referred to May, and with the circumstances that had led Mr. Wren to London.

Mr. Wren listened. When his daughter, through sheer physical weakness, at last stopped talking, he said : " Then I am to go to-morrow ? "

" Yes, to-morrow. I wish I could snatch you away this moment." Then Evangeline flung herself out of the room without pecking her father's cheek, without a handshake, without a look or a word of farewell.

Evangeline all but fell over the stooping Mrs. Scrubbs. That good lady had been dusting the outside handle of the bedroom door. She had been dusting it for some time. When she was certain that Evangeline had left the house she went downstairs. " If there's one thing I enjoy more than anything else," she said, " it's a good downright quarrel between people wot aren't in any way related to me, and I must say I've 'ad a real treat to-day."

When May Flynn came into the room Mr. Wren asked her to arrange the pillows so that he could sit up in bed with comfort.

" What do you want to do ? " inquired the girl.
" Preach a sermon ? "

"No," replied Mr. Wren, "I want you to tell me what happened after I was knocked down in the theatre. I suppose Pandova is still giving his obscene performance?"

The girl sat down on the bed. "Pandova," she said, "will never sing or dance again. *Pandova is dead!*"

"Dead?"

"Yes, dead. When you were struck down it seemed that the audience, especially the women, went raving mad. They fought their way to the stage like a pack of hungry wolves in search of something to appease their hunger. The musicians in the orchestra and members of the theatre staff tried to stop them, but they might just as well have tried to stem the inrush of the sea, and many were trampled to death. By this time the noise was terrible. As the women surged through the orchestra they seemed to have turned from wolves into fiends. Blood streamed from their faces and necks, and hands and arms. One stout, coarse-looking woman had nearly all her clothing torn away. Her eyes were distended, and she seemed to be talking a kind of jibberish that was indescribably horrible. And all the time Pandova stood perfectly still. Why he did not go away, or why the curtain was not lowered, I cannot say."

The girl paused for a moment and looked tenderly at Mr. Wren. Mrs. Scrubbs had already given her a vivid account of the scene which had taken place

between the curate and his daughter. She realised with no little pride and happiness that he had defended her as chivalrously as Don Quixote had defended his beloved Dulcinea del Toboso.

"Shall I go on, Baby?" she inquired anxiously, "I don't want to excite you too much."

"No, no, you won't excite me too much. Go on."

"Well," continued the girl, "the frenzied women at last reached the stage. They rushed upon Pandova with extended arms. They clung to him. They kissed him. They pulled him this way and that. They kissed him with bloody mouths, bound him with bloody arms, and pressed him to bloody breasts. Pandova must have fallen, for the women were in a bending position, like men in a football scrum. Then they fell upon him as he lay on the stage—they seemed to shake him, bite him, tear him, toss him to and fro. Suddenly I heard the most awful shrieks imaginable. They came from the women on the stage, who now suddenly shot back from their prey with such a look of horror that I shall never forget it. They had killed Pandova. They had smothered him to death. I heard afterwards, Baby, that, when the mangled remains of Pandova lay on the stage in a pool of blood, his face was not beautiful, not even human. I heard that at the last, at the last he had the head of a baboon and that there was long, black hair on his chest."

The girl stopped speaking. Her hands were shaking and her eyes were unusually bright.

"And you," said Mr. Wren, struggling against increasing weakness which he tried to conceal, "are you sorry Pandova is dead?"

"He was so beautiful," she began. "It seems so terrible to destroy anything beautiful."

"Not beautiful," he said quietly. "No one who incites to lust can be really beautiful. Pandova was lust personified. Pandova was Anti-Christ."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Now I'll tell you something, Baby. When you got up and began to speak, no one in the audience seemed to hear you, or if they did no one seemed to take any notice. But Pandova heard you. He heard you call him Anti-Christ. I saw him look straight at you. I saw his lips move, and if ever a man showed hatred combined with fear, Pandova showed it then."

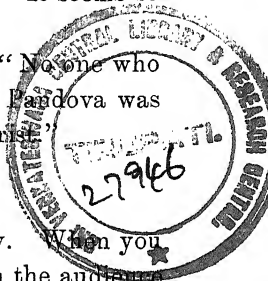
"And are you sorry that he is dead?" said Mr. Wren wistfully.

"No, not so very sorry. It was all so horrible at the end."

"At the end and all the way through. London is cleaner and better because Pandova's dead."

Mr. Wren looked at the girl steadily for some time. Then he said: "I suppose you'll marry and settle down some day."

"The old trite phrase! You speak about marriage as if it were a kind of hen-roost, a broody, stodgy



institution. As I can't get the man I want, I'm not going to make a silly fool of myself by marrying somebody I don't want."

"You haven't told me about the man you do want. Perhaps I might be able to help you. Perhaps Evangeline—"

"Evangeline? When I get very, very old, Baby, I'll go to Evangeline for a pattern of a red flannel petticoat—but I shan't wear the petticoat. I shall cut it up and make the pieces into covers for hot-water bottles!"

She went to the dressing-table and dabbed her pretty face with a powder-puff, rouged her lips and performed some mysterious operation which had the effect of tinting her eyelids.

"May," said Mr. Wren, amazed at his audacity.

"What is it, Baby?"

"Come here."

The girl obeyed meekly.

Mr. Wren put out his hand. "I want to thank you for all you have done. You have been so good to me, so good. Oh, feel what I want to express but cannot, because words are too feeble, too poor, to give voice to the gratitude I am feeling now!"

The girl slipped her hand into his. It trembled there like a warm, fluttering bird.

May suddenly withdrew her hand. "I must go now," she said quickly.

"Is it worth while?"

“What do you mean, Baby?”

“I know where you are going, what you are going to do.”

“You know, Baby?”

“Yes, I know.”

“And are you angry with me?”

“How can I be angry with you? But I am more sorry than I can say.”

“I’ll not go, Baby, to-night. I’ll not go any more, I promise.”

“I am going away to-night,” said the little curate.

“To-morrow, Baby. Evangeline said to-morrow.”

“My going away has nothing to do with Evangeline.”

“The girl put her hands to her face and uttered a cry of pain. She ran to the bedside and put her arms round the little curate. “Oh, Baby, you mustn’t die. I won’t let you. Baby—”

A wonderful light shone into the room. Mr. Wren saw it and smiled. “The Master is coming to London,” he said softly. “The Master—”

“The Master has come,” said the girl quietly. “He has come to me!”

THANKS TO OMAR

MR. ALFRED HIGGINS spent most of his time amongst meat—pendulous meat that hung in a semicircle at the back of the shop, on counters, or naked and unashamed in the window for the observation of passers-by. Mr. Higgins saw nothing indelicate in being a butcher. He would cut a shoulder of mutton or other joint with the eye of a sculptor, and even have poetical or philosophical thoughts while negotiating a chop. Most butchers throw suet into the scales without the least emotion. Not so Mr. Higgins, who performed this duty with an intelligent smile and with the manner of a conjuror performing a particularly clever trick.

In short, Mr. Higgins was no ordinary butcher.

Thanks to a penny paper of a mildly literary flavour he was able to improve his mind, and he did so with a diligence that sometimes surprised his customers. He could tell you what Beethoven had for breakfast, and though he could not pronounce Nietzsche correctly, he was able to quote him as the most incomprehensible of writers. He knew exactly the distance of the sun from the earth, and so varied was his fund of information that he could tell you

the story of a lump of coal, and that Marie Antoinette had an extremely small neck.

Mr. Higgins's knowledge, however scrappy and chaotic it may have been, was a source of joy to him. It added zest to his life, and most especially when he had the pleasure of imparting his information to others. Some of his customers—particularly those who took away their purchases wrapped up in newspaper—simply stared at Mr. Higgins when he told them that Shakespeare could not spell his name consistently, or that it would take a snail something like five hundred years to crawl from Land's End to John o' Groats; but for the most part his clients regarded him as an interesting character, a man who would one day set the Thames on fire.

Mr. Higgins's modest staff comprised Miss Emma Jorkins, a young lady with fair hair, blue eyes, and a remarkably good complexion, who kept the books, and Bill Brown, the errand-boy, who took orders and delivered the same when he had sufficiently enjoyed a dog fight or any other street scene of particular interest. Nothing would induce Mr. Higgins's mother to officiate in the shop, and that good lady confined her attention to domestic duties.

One Saturday night, after Mr. Higgins had unhooked the carcasses and tenderly carried them down to the cellar, he proceeded to distribute sawdust over the floor of the shop with a lavish hand, as if he were sowing precious seed and expected a rich harvest in

due season. While thus engaged, Miss Jorkins, having made up the books and locked the safe, suddenly remarked—

“Who was Omar Kijam?”

Mr. Higgins, raising one hand full of sawdust, observed—

“Omar Kijam was a Persian poet, Miss Jorkins, and no doubt a man of mark in 'is day.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Miss Jorkins, with a giggle. “I’ve been reading 'im lately, and 'pon my word and soul, I can’t make 'ead or tail of 'im. Blarsephemous, ain’t it?”

“By no means, Miss Jorkins; but, mind you, Omar ain’t to be judged by no common standard. 'E was a man with a loaf of bread in the desert tryin’ to find 'isself. 'Is little bit about pots is touchin’, and 'e wanted very much to smash up this world and make another. You must read 'im again, Miss Jorkins, not forgettin’ that 'e’s totally different to Wordsworth or dear old Mrs. 'Emans, then all of a sudden you’ll grasp the power of 'is langwidge, likewise 'is picturesque imagery.”

Miss Jorkins put on her hat and rolled down her veil.

“I’ll read 'im again, Mr. 'Iggins, and per’aps, not being a scholard myself, you’ll 'elp me with them verses that I can’t understand.”

“Cert’inly,” said Mr. Higgins. “Po’try’s a big subject, Miss Jorkins, and requires a lot of brain

work to fathom all its beautiful depths and dizzy-fying 'eights. 'If you don't at first succeed, try, try again,' as the spider said to King Bruce w'en 'e was very down'earted."

"Yes, that's it," replied Miss Jorkins, coming out of the desk with a smile which her employer, for all his wisdom, mistook for a newly awakened interest in literary matters. "Good-night, Mr. 'Iggins."

"Good-night, Miss Jorkins."

Mr. Higgins, having put up the shutters, retired to the parlour, well pleased at having made another convert to the realms of literature. He took out his literary paper from behind the mantelpiece clock, and was soon absorbed in reading its fascinating and instructive pages.

"Alf," remarked Mrs. Higgins, after she had watched her son for some time, "Alf!"

"Yes, mother," said Mr. Higgins, marking a passage in the paper with a blunt pencil, only efficacious after it had been placed in his mouth.

"Didn't I 'ear you talkin' to Miss Jorkins just before you shut up the shop?"

"Yes. I was 'ighly gratified to find that Miss Jorkins is improvin' 'er mind. She wants encouragement, and, wot's more, she shall 'ave it."

"Jus' you be careful, Alf. Me and you is very comf'able, ain't we? So jus' you be careful, Alf."

Mr. Higgins indulged in one of his breezy, high-pitched laughs.

“ Miss Jorkins ain’t Cleopatra, or ’Elen of ’Troy, or yet a S’lambo, and even if she were one of them great women of ancient times, ’twouldn’t upset Alfred ’Iggins, Esquire. Dear me, no! I reckon books—them stolid classical books—is proof against female wiles. Plato ’as said——”

“ It don’t matter wot Plato said. All I say is—jus’ you be careful. You ’aven’t fallen in love yet, Alf, and I ’ope you never will. Be very careful of the springtime. Spring always plays ’avoc with the best of us.”

“ The hides of March,” murmured Mr. Higgins as he resumed his reading.

For a long time there was silence in the parlour, save for the ticking of the clock and the rustle of paper. Suddenly Mr. Higgins sprang from his chair.

“ I’ve got an idea!” he shouted ecstatically. “ Why shouldn’t I join the ’appy band of orfers? Why shouldn’t I write a hepic that’ll fair stagger ’umdrum ’umanity? ”

“ Wot, give up the business? ” queried Mrs. Higgins testily. “ Don’t be a fool, Alf. Stick to chops and cutlets, that’s my motter, and a very good motter it is, too.”

“ Don’t come to ’asty conclusions, mother. Of course I shouldn’t give up the business, but there’d be no ’arm in adding to me income by doin’ a little writin’ in the evenin’.”

Mrs. Higgins sniffed contemptuously.

"You're beside yerself, Alf. You're puffed up, and people wot are puffed up nat'rally can't see straight. Don't ape yer betters, Alf. You can cut a rump steak—"

"And there was a Rump Parliament," put in Mr. Higgins, "which only goes to show that the butcherin' business can be extended to politics, and if to politics, why not to lit'ratur'? Bacon was a writer, 'Ogg a poet, and, goin' to the fishmonger's trade, so was Crabbe, too."

"You're simply ordacious, Alf, ordacious and w'eedlin'; but since you're set on writing, and since yer wish to go against your old mother, *try*."

Mr. Higgins needed no second invitation. He looked in the glass, smoothed down the hair at the back of his head, adjusted his tie, and, having produced paper and writing materials, sat down at the table with his big red hands resting upon it.

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At the end of half an hour Mrs. Higgins said—

"Wot 'ave yer written, Alf?"

"'The,'" replied her son, rather crestfallen.

"That all?"

"Yes. The Muse won't work no 'ow."

"Well, Alf, if yer can only write 'the' after sittin' down for 'alf an hour, 'tis a sure sign that you ain't got the gift for scribblin'."

"You're right, mother."

"I'm always right, Alf. Read as much as yer like, learn as much as yer like, talk as much as yer like, chop up and sell as much meat as yer like, but don't *write*."

Mr. Higgins, feeling that the domestic strain was a little trying, went out for a short walk. When he returned he had regained his good spirits, talked affably to his mother, and did full justice to the meal set before him.

That night, as on every other night, Mr. Higgins read in bed, and by way of refreshing his memory he perused Omar Khayyam's verses before going to sleep. It may have been the result of a heavy supper, but whatever the cause, Mr. Higgins dreamt that he shook hands with Omar and introduced him to Miss Jorkins.

When, on the following Monday morning, Mrs. Higgins, quite by chance, pulled aside a little curtain and looked through the glass door connecting the parlour with the shop, she noticed with disapproval that Miss Jorkins was wearing a new blouse and that she had retrimmed her hat.

Her son, however, had no eye for such trifles ; but Miss Jorkins, smiling and rosy, lost no time in speaking to her amiable employer about Omar Khayyam. She had brought her own sixpenny edition with her, and during a lull in business her little finger glided over certain mysterious lines, while Mr. Higgins bent over her and dispelled her difficulties, to his infinite satisfaction.

"*I love Omar!*" exclaimed Miss Jorkins rapturously, immediately she had booked Mrs. Kenning-Smith for a sweetbread. "Things is openin' up somethin' wonderful!"

"Yes, yes," replied Mr. Higgins, tucking his thumbs into his waistcoat and expanding his chest. "There's such a lot of openin' up to be done in this world, specially in lit'ratur'. You're a hapt pupil, Miss Jorkins, and I've no doubt that before long you'll be able to study Wagner's *Ring* with real enjoyment."

"*Ring?*" said Miss Jorkins, giggling. "I'm quite sure I should like *that!*"

Her guileless employer beamed approval, while the little curtain over the glass door fluttered ominously.

"There's nothin' like Natur'," continued Mr. Higgins, "flowers and trees and that, for 'elpin' one to understand the beauties of po'try. I read Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' in Kew Gardens for the first time, and I don't mind tellin' you, Miss Jorkins, that wot with the beauty of the lines and the 'toxicatin' surroundin's, I was so transported with delight that it was a long time before I could pull myself together."

"My!" exclaimed Miss Jorkins sympathetically. "You don't say so!" Then, with just the faintest suspicion of a sigh: "I've never been to Kew Gardens. Must be a fine place, Mr. 'Iggins, from all accounts."

"Never been to Kew Gardens? Then you 'ave neglected your edication, Miss Jorkins. Kew Gardens is the halpha and homeka of all that's truly beautiful.

You must certainly to go Kew Gardens—in spring.”

“It’s spring now,” said Miss Jorkins naïvely.

“So ’tis,” replied Mr. Higgins, rolling a filler. “On Wednesday I’ll take you to Kew Gardens where we can study the poets together. Mind, quite platonic, Miss Jorkins.”

“Oh, cert’inly!” said that young lady, without the least understanding what platonic meant.

Precisely at three o’clock on Wednesday afternoon Mr. Higgins and Miss Jorkins entered Kew Gardens. Miss Jorkins, heavily scented with patchouli, was in ecstasies. She shrieked with delight when she saw a cherry tree in full bloom, laughed at the liver-coated officials parading the grounds, and went into raptures over a great glass house facing a lake.

“Well,” she said at last, “this is a wonderful place and no mistake. It don’t seem like an ordinary garden, do it?”

“It’s more like the Garden of ’Esperance,” observed Mr. Higgins, noticing for the first time that his trousers were baggy at the knees.

“Yes, I dare say it is,” replied Miss Jorkins sweetly. “Anyway, it’s a bit of all right on a scale like this. Wot ’ave you got in that little black bag, Mr. ’Iggins? Sandwiches?”

“Food for thought,” replied Mr. Higgins, in other words, Miss Jorkins, a few of our English

poets, for amid these palpitatin' surroundin's we must not forget the object of our visit—ah! that is the very seat w'ere I read Keat's 'Ode to a Nightingale'."

"Then we'll sit there, Mr. 'Iggins," and the butcher and his accountant sat on the seat accordingly.

Mr. Higgins opened his bag and began to read aloud, laying stress on "the's" and "a's," and always stopping at the end of a line, even when it was devoid of punctuation.

"*Lovely!*" exclaimed Miss Jorkins when the butcher had read aloud half a dozen poems in a particularly sing-song manner. "Who wrote 'em?"

"Wordsworth, Miss Jorkins, our greatest English Natur' poet."

"Well, I'm sure them verses do 'im credit. Mr. 'Iggins, I've often wanted to arst you, aren't there any love-poems in the English langwidge?"

"'Eaps," replied Mr. Higgins, gazing at a magnolia tree, gay with lavender-white blossom; "'eaps and 'eaps. In fact, Miss Jorkins, I may say, without fear of contradiction, that nearly all po'try is inspired by the gentle passion."

"Ah!" sighed the young lady, as she sat a little nearer to Mr. Higgins and peeped at him coily.

Mr. Higgins grew a trifle confused as he fumbled in his bag and drew forth *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. He fingered the volume nervously, and then began to read.

"Sounds true, don't it?" observed Miss Jorkins with approval.

"It is true!" replied Mr. Higgins, with a touch of vehemence. "It's the real thing!"

"How do you know?"

Mr. Higgins was silent. For once he could not answer a question. He took off his bowler hat and wiped his forehead with a slightly frayed handkerchief. The blue sky and the sunshine, the scent of the magnolia, and the proximity of Miss Jorkins, were having a strange effect upon him. He put away the book he had been reading and closed the black bag.

"Well?" said Miss Jorkins.

"You must take it for granted that I do know," replied the butcher. "I little thought, Miss Jorkins, that a time would come w'en all me learnin' would fail me. You'll 'ave to find some one else to teach you. I can 'ardly expect you to understand me feelin's. There's magic in the spring and there's such a lot of—of—Venus in it, too!"

Miss Jorkins took off her gloves and rolled up her veil. "I should like you to go on teachin' me, Mr. 'Iggins, if it's all the same to you."

"Emma," said Mr. Higgins, catching hold of her hand, "can't we improve our minds together? Can't we always be together? Not Wagner's *Ring*—but, but another kind of ring!"

"Yes, Alf. That would be better than all the Omar Kijams in the world, wouldn't it?"

“ Cert’inly, Emma. But we owe Omar somethin’, don’t we ? ”

“ *Per’aps !* ” said Emma, as Mr. Higgins took her in his arms.

THE GHOST OF HIRAM-BARKER

I

WE had always been interested in Max Dudley at the club, and yet, had we been asked to explain our interest in him, we should have found it extremely difficult to offer anything like a reasonable explanation of our partiality for him. Dudley was not exactly a sociable man. There were days when he buried himself behind a newspaper and never spoke a word; but even at such times we were conscious of his marked personality. He possessed extremely piercing grey eyes, and once having seen those eyes it was impossible to forget them. They had a way of looking through you—cold, steady, grey fires that seemed to plumb the depths of your being. There was, in short, a magnetic attraction about Dudley. His will was dominant, and there was never any truckling to those flattering courtesies under which lesser men sought shelter. We often talked about him in the club. We wondered if his almost perpetual melancholy was the result of

some unfortunate love-affair. It was certainly difficult to imagine Dudley falling in love, but it might have been possible years ago. Though we discussed him frequently, he remained to the last an enigma to which we could find no key. One or two of the more daring members had tried to pump him. But they came away from the ordeal sick with some indefinable dread. There was some curious magic about those eyes of his. They read others, but never yielded up any secrets of their own.

One night Dudley came into the club. His face was more pallid than usual. There was a slight nervousness about him which we had not observed before. He sat down in a big red chair. I remember that we stopped talking when he came into the room. We were expecting something, but we did not know what. The clock ticked, a coal fell from the fire, some one coughed.

"Well, I suppose we can talk," said Malcolm presently. "What are we waiting for?"

No one answered him. We were all watching Dudley, his thin, white hands stretched out on either leg and his head thrown well back.

Suddenly Dudley leant forward. "I don't often inflict a story upon you fellows," he said in his slow, precise way, "but I'm going to tell you rather a strange yarn to-night."

The tension was at an end. We breathed again as we murmured our thanks.

"I must tell the story in my own way," said Dudley. "I shan't deviate more than I can help, but I must trouble you with a short preamble, a few preliminaries before I begin the story itself.

"I suppose the majority of you fellows are materialists. If you consider the spirit-world at all, you do so with a big grain of salt. It's something vague, intangible, something that you never allow to interfere with your business. You live in this world and regard another world as quite possible, even desirable, but nevertheless a world that does not possess the vital importance of this one. I don't blame you for being materialists, half-hearted materialists. You can't help it, because you haven't realised the latent power that is in you, the searchlight that might, if you possessed the necessary knowledge, be turned upon those forces that seem to you to be connected with the miraculous, but are in reality not supernatural but supernormal. Spiritualism has been connected with a good deal of charlatanism simply because professional mediums are expected to produce spirit phenomena. Now spirit phenomena should never be presented in exchange for cash. A good deal of rot goes on in the séance-room—dummy hands and arms, drapery, perfume-sprays, and various pneumatic appliances. But there is something valuable connected with Spiritualism. It isn't all

table-turning, talks with a dead grandmother, and high falutin'. I have always been interested in the occult. It's part and parcel of my temperament. Had I lived in the old days I should assuredly have been burnt. As I happen to live in the twentieth century, I am permitted to go scot-free, and even to have the privilege of sitting in this club and chatting about it.

"My sister, Margaret, was at one time engaged to John Hiram-Barker. I had always disliked the man, and my dislike, as it turned out afterwards, was well founded. Without wishing to go too fully into the matter, I must explain that for certain reasons the engagement was broken off. Margaret was well rid of the man in my opinion. She was blind to his most palpable faults. She could never see that the fellow had been trifling with her affections, and that it was a dastardly game without rules which he had been playing nearly all his life. From the moment I discovered what manner of scoundrel Hiram-Barker was, I was fully resolved on vengeance of some kind. Every day Margaret's silent sorrow fanned my desire to administer something more terrifying than a horse-whipping to one who had wrecked and blighted my sister's life. Only those who are mealy-mouthed will tell you, with a simper, that vengeance is not sweet. It is sweet sometimes, for there are occasions when we must strike a blow, when we must tear up, root and branch, evil with evil. I am not the kind of man who will take an injury quietly, and almost apologise

for the injury itself. Not a bit of it ! I make my plans ; I go slow ; I wait ; but in the end I get the blow home.

“ Well, I was resolved on vengeance, but on what kind of vengeance I did not determine all at once. I brooded over the matter for several days. Then suddenly I had an inspiration. I would put my occult knowledge to practical use and risk the consequences. You will say : ‘ Why didn’t you resort to more ordinary, more tangible, methods ? ’ My answer is, like the answer of certain politicians : Wait and see ! ”

III

“ Just before the Christmas of 1890 I wrote to Hiram-Barker asking him to spend a few days with us. In the ordinary way it would have been worse than useless to have written to him. In the ordinary way he would have very properly refused the invitation, for at Christmas, of all times of the year, we do not seek out unpleasant, and perhaps disastrous, situations.

“ Have you ever tried to make a stranger look at you in a theatre, in a street, anywhere ? It is a simple, elementary experiment well worth trying, and it will be successful in the majority of cases, provided you have the power of concentration. You must believe in yourself as you believe in nothing else, and then many things suddenly become possible that were impossible before. It is child’s play to make anyone

look at me, to make them perform certain actions, to read their thoughts. When I wrote to Hiram-Barker my invitation was really a command that he had not the strength of will to resist. The letter was a stout chain, and even while I was writing it I knew that it was slowly but surely pulling my victim toward me.

“Hiram-Barker arrived late on Christmas Eve, and Margaret had gone to bed. He was shown into my smoking-room, where, I remember, I was poring over a book. I could see at a glance that the man meant to bluff it.

“‘Well, Dudley,’ he said, rushing forward in his beastly breezy way, ‘it’s nice to see you again. Margaret all right? I’m afraid I messed things up rather—eh, what? You’re looking awfully fit, a bit stouter than you used to be. Seems funny to be down here for Christmas. Had to come. Couldn’t resist it. Are we going to let bygones be bygones, and . . . er . . . have goodwill and all the rest of it that happens to be friendly and seasonable?’

“‘You can take a chair, Barker,’ I said, ‘and when you’ve taken it, it would be as well to understand each other before we go any further.’

“‘Oh, certainly,’ replied Barker. ‘Anything you like, my dear chap. But if you’ll allow me to say so, you’re confoundedly serious.’

“I told Barker that I had never been so serious in my life before. I saw him struggling to be genial,

facetious. I saw him trying his utmost to conceal his real feelings, his dread of me.

“‘Do you know, Dudley,’ he said at last, ‘you’re rather a queer sort of fellow. You don’t mix enough with others. You’re getting too introspective and just a trifle uncanny. Yes, that’s it, uncanny. I hope you don’t bear me malice over the affair with Margaret. If it’s a question of making it up, why. . .’

“‘No,’ I replied quietly, ‘don’t make any mistake on that point. It certainly isn’t a question of making it up. Margaret is to be heartily congratulated on not having the misfortune to marry you.’

“Hiram-Barker winced at that. He had a retort ready, but he knew better than to give it utterance just then. He knew that he was dealing with an enemy, and that it was his best policy to keep calm and play his cards carefully.

“‘Don’t you think,’ said Barker after a pause, ‘that you could run to a ghost story? They’re awfully fashionable just now. Scarcely a Christmas number without one. Start off something like this: It was a dark winter’s night, and the wind howled horribly round the ancient walls of Spook Castle . . .’

“‘I’ll trouble you to keep your mouth shut for a few minutes,’ I said. ‘You’ll not want a ghost story when I’ve finished with you!’

“I then placed a piece of note-paper upon the table.

“‘It is possible for me,’ I said, ‘to make that paper move perceptibly by simply concentrating my will upon it.’

“‘Indeed!’ exclaimed Barker. ‘Then you don’t want to borrow my watch or hat for the present? I hope, however, to see before long two kicking rabbits in either hand, coils of coloured paper round your feet, to say nothing of a bowl of goldfish. Fire away, Dudley, and, for Heaven’s sake, *talk*! No conjuror can perform a trick without considerable gagging. It’s all part of the business.’

“I took no notice of Barker’s remarks, but confined my attention to the paper on the table. Five minutes, ten minutes went by; then the paper moved across the table-cloth.

“The experiment, simple as it was, impressed Barker. I saw him staring stupidly at the paper.

“‘Awfully clever,’ he said at last. ‘Can’t think how you do it. But do you mind switching off on to something else? My nerves are a bit shaky to-night.’

“When I informed Barker that I intended to draw his soul from his body, his eyes protruded, his jaw dropped. He sat before me a huddled heap of a man, protesting feebly, waving his hands about as if to ward off a blow. I explained to Barker that when the soul is driven from the body, it is attached to its material case by a thin, ethereal cord, which, if broken, would cause instantaneous death. It was

this reference to the cord that affected Barker most deeply. His head suddenly shot forward. I saw his facial muscles twitch, a dry tongue dart out and lick the parched lips.

"I touched an electric button. A small disc began to revolve briskly, and it was placed in such a position that a spot of light played intermittently upon it.

"'Has your experiment anything to do with Margaret?' groaned Barker, keeping his eyes almost unconsciously fixed upon the revolving disc.

"'Yes, it has,' I said hotly. 'You have wronged the best woman in the world, whose only mistake was that she loved, and still loves, a man wholly unworthy of her. No, don't interrupt. I have not finished yet. My sister's future is at stake. Yours shall be at stake now. I shall have your ghost to play with, just as you played with Margaret's heart—and I shall play with it! I could almost break that thin white cord and send you forth to answer God's reckoning! But I shall not break it. I must not. . . . I see you are attracted by that little disc over there. You may be surprised to learn that you cannot withdraw your eyes!'

"Hiram-Barker tried, but completely failed to do so. It held him as a snake's eye holds a sparrow's. He cursed under his breath. Sweat poured down his face. He sobbed like a child. He begged for mercy. He groaned. Still the disc went on revolving, and still the electric light fell upon it. Barker gave one

convulsive movement, and then lay still in his chair.

“Now, when Barker was in a light hypnotic trance, I went over to him. I placed my hands about an eighth of an inch from the top of his head, and drew them slowly down over his face to the middle of his body, and then sharply turned my palms outward. This pass I continued for something like twenty minutes, and by that time Barker was in a state of unconsciousness infinitely deeper and more potent than sleep. At last, being clairvoyant, I could see the aura round Barker’s body. I could see dark and luminous lines intersecting each other in the form of a series of waves. An hour went by, and still I made the passes I have described to you. I never faltered. I never grew weary. Vengeance, however morbid you may regard my interpretation of it, sustained me. I was performing a psychological feat. I was about to play with the ghost of an enemy.

“Suddenly the aura, that had been continually thickening with my passes, broke, and stood, a pale, phosphorescent glow on either side of Barker’s body. Gradually these clouds, I can think of no other name for them, grew more distinct. Then they united, and I saw, faintly at first, an exact replica of my enemy. I was looking at the ghost of Hiram-Barker !

“I watched the ghost glide about the room in frantic despair. I saw, what no one likes to see, the utter rottenness of a contemptible man. That figure,

gesticulating wildly, seemed to understand everything I said, and I talked a good deal, straight talk that went home. I learnt in that moment what torture can mean. I learnt what it is to know another man's soul through and through. The thin white cord, that seemed capable of infinite expansion, fascinated me. One touch and it would be all over with Hiram-Barker—just one touch. But I only gazed at the thin white cord. I did not break it.

“As I stood in the room I heard people singing carols outside. Then the town clock struck midnight, and I prepared to retire to rest. ‘Good night, Hiram-Barker. You’ll come to presently,’ I said, as I walked softly out of the room.

“Margaret told me afterwards that early on that Christmas morning she awoke with an almost overpowering impression that Hiram-Barker was in her room. She turned on the electric light, but there was no one there, at least she could see no one. Every moment, however, Margaret grew more conscious of his nearness to her. It seemed that he was calling her, that he was in the gravest danger and distress. She put on her dressing-gown, and her first thought was to call me. I wish with all my heart that she had done so. She felt, however, strongly influenced to go downstairs and into the smoking-room. She answered that strange suggestion.

“When she arrived at the smoking-room door, she paused, and held the handle in her hand for a long

time without turning it. Then suddenly her blood ran cold. Some one, something, was slowly turning the handle on the other side of the door! She was too frightened to run away. She seemed rooted to the spot. Then the door opened, but no one greeted her horrified gaze. She looked timidly into the room and saw Hiram-Barker sitting in a chair, apparently fast asleep. The sight awakened old memories. It was almost a relief to see Barker, the man she still loved, poor child, sitting in that chair. Had she been able to see his ghost, it would have been a different matter, but fortunately, or unfortunately, she could see no such thing.

“All fear left Margaret now. She came into the room and sat down on a big dump in front of the still glowing fire. As she looked at the embers, she told me that a sense of peace seemed to possess her. And so, however reprehensible it may have been, my sister gave herself up to reverie—romantic, dreamy reverie.

“Margaret confessed to me that she rose from her seat and broke off a piece of mistletoe. ‘It is Christmas to-day,’ she said. ‘He sleeps. He cannot know.’ Then Margaret—poor girl, don’t think harshly of her—leant forward and kissed him.

“Margaret re-seated herself on the dump. The red glow of the fire must have shone upon her as she continued her reverie. Had she looked behind her, she would have seen Barker’s lips moving in an effort

to speak. Presently he made a slight sound. Margaret looked at him.

“‘What is it?’ she inquired gently.

“‘I love you, Margaret,’ said Barker. ‘Love has come now. Can you . . . can you forgive me?’

“My sister was under the impression that he was talking in his sleep, but the words were sweet to her, and she answered: ‘Yes, dear, I forgive you, because I have always forgiven you, and always loved you—always.’

“I am not quite sure what Barker said then, but I think he replied: ‘It is very wonderful. Thank you. I understand . . . Margaret . . . Margaret . . .’

“At that moment I must have been dimly conscious of what was taking place. I got up hastily, went downstairs, and entered the smoking-room.

“‘Margaret,’ I said quietly, ‘kindly go to bed at once. I will speak to you about this matter later on.’

“In coming forward to give Margaret my hand, I slipped back a little. The thin white cord was broken. A tremor passed over the body in the chair.

“‘Well, Margaret,’ I said, ‘what is it? Why do you wait?’

“‘Because I believe that something wonderful has happened. I believe that Mr. Hiram-Barker loves me now,’ said Margaret softly.

“‘Something wonderful has happened,’ I said; ‘Barker is dead. I killed him a moment ago!’

“ ‘Dead ? You killed him ? ’ was all poor Margaret could say in the agony of her grief as she left me and blindly rushed to her room.”

* * * * *

There was silence in the club for some time. Then, one by one, we murmured our thanks, and afterwards grew confused as we watched Dudley. He was half concealed behind a newspaper, over which tobacco-smoke was rising.

“Hullo !” he said sharply, bringing down the paper with a jerk. “Did I hear some one say ‘Thanks’ ? Thanks for what ? ”

“For your story,” we said.

“Story ? ” snapped Dudley. “Story ? Why I’ve been reading for the last hour. I haven’t spoken a word. I never tell yarns.”

* * * * *

Dudley is dead now. He was the queerest and most interesting man we had in the club, but he has ever remained an insoluble riddle.

DREAM PILLS

PROFESSOR TANTUM entered one of those marble halls in the city devoted to light refreshment. He took off his wide-brimmed felt hat and revealed a dome-shaped head usually associated with Shakespeare and one of our leading novelists. Having allowed his heavy coat to slip over his shoulders, he sat down.

The Professor waited patiently for ten minutes, and as no one seemed to have any idea of ascertaining his requirements, he thrust forth a fat, dumpy hand and rang a bell.

When the bell rang several customers looked round in alarm, and one or two waitresses, who had apparently never heard the sound before, raised their eyebrows. Tantum, however, enjoyed the joke, and repeated his performance several times.

At length a waitress condescended to approach him. "Did you ring?" she inquired.

"I did," said the Professor. "Oblige me with a glass of hot milk and a piece of lunch cake."

As soon as Tantum had given his order a young man sat down opposite to him. He was evidently impressed with the Professor's head, for he gazed at it solemnly for some time.

"Excuse me," said the young man, "but you have one of the most remarkable craniums I have ever seen, and I should say that the weight of your brain is considerable."

"It is," said the Professor, raising the glass of hot milk to his lips and then removing it suddenly. "I have the honour to be an inventor, but up to the present I am sorry to say that my inventions have not met with the success they so richly deserve. I am now engaged in concocting a lotion which will render shaving a thing of the past. It is easy enough to destroy permanently the growth of hair on the face. The difficulty is to do so without destroying or dreadfully disfiguring the physiognomy. I am most anxious to invent something which will confer a blessing upon humanity at large, but, alas, I have but little money. Money, sir, is the key to success, and without it the most promising doors of discovery remain locked and inaccessible."

"I have money," said the young man, "any amount of it. Have another glass of milk, and allow me to pay for it."

"Thanks. You said you had plenty of money?"

"Yes," replied the young man, "and what's more, I am willing to put that money at the disposal of anyone who will invent a new kind of pill."

"Overdone," said the Professor sadly, "dreadfully overdone. I am proud to say that I have never taken

a pill in my life. I find the sipping of cold water in the morning——”

“You misunderstand me. I am referring to what I call ‘Dream Pills’.”

“Dream Pills?” murmured the Professor, allowing his hand to move slowly over the top of his head. “You mean pills that will produce certain definite dreams?”

“I do,” replied the young man, leaning eagerly over the table. “We spend six to eight hours in sleep, and those hours are, for the most part, a blank. We all dream occasionally, and sometimes we have horrible nightmares indeed; but, speaking broadly, our nights are dull and heavy in the extreme when they might become a source of most fascinating entertainment without in any way overtaxing the semi-conscious brain. I have long been looking out for a large human head that should plainly indicate unusual mental development. You, sir, possess such a head, and I see in you the future inventor of Dream Pills.”

“My dear friend!” exclaimed the Professor, extending his hand. “Your idea is brilliant, and I may say, without any hesitation, eminently practical and of a kind that simply must spell fame and fortune for us both.”

“Good,” said the young man. “I place five thousand pounds at your disposal for the development of the Dream Pill scheme. I haven’t my

cheque book with me now, but if you care to call at my house this evening I shall have much pleasure in presenting you with the money."

"My dear friend!" murmured the Professor again. "Your generosity overwhelms me. As soon as I have the money—indeed, as soon as I return home—I shall commence experiments, and within a few days the pills will be ready."

"When you have invented the pills," said the young man earnestly, "we must advertise them in a new and thrilling manner. We must have a swell establishment in the West End where you will wear an imposing robe and where you will be prepared to talk to our fashionable clients. I have already thought of a striking line for an advertisement—'A Cinema while you sleep'. What do you think of that?"

"Beautiful!" said the Professor. "Most striking, and so topical. There isn't the slightest doubt that as we sit together in this modest establishment we are on the eve of an epoch-making discovery—Dream Pills. Why, my dear sir, the sooner I make these new pills the better."

When the young man had offered Tantum his card they shook hands cordially. They shook hands again in the street. Then the young man, whose name was Benjamin Banks, went to his palatial rooms, while the Professor hurried to a boarding-house in Bloomsbury.

Tantum was at all times sanguine, but as he entered the boarding-house and ran upstairs to his dingy apartment, half sitting-room, half laboratory, he was more sanguine than usual.

"That young man," he said, peering at test-tubes and retorts and Bunsen burners, "is either mad or a genius. Since it is extremely difficult to draw a dividing line between the two, I shall give him the benefit of the doubt—provided he hands over the money to-night."

The Professor lost no time in setting to work. Within a few minutes he had produced such a combination of horrible smells, compared with which sulphuretted hydrogen was a pleasant perfume, that his landlady came into the room, and, holding her handkerchief to her nose, gave Tantum notice to quit her house as soon as possible.

"Don't be a fool," said the Professor sharply. "I am about to make a stupendous discovery. Within a few months my name will be a household word, and I shall be simply rolling in money."

"You have said that before," observed the landlady acidly. "This is my house, and I won't have every room filled with an abominable odour. You will have the goodness to clear out, you and your bottles and evil smells!"

"To-night," said the Professor, rising impressively from the table, "I shall come into the possession of

five thousand pounds. I am quite willing to go elsewhere——”

“Oh, very well,” replied the landlady gently. “If you really come into that large sum of money, you may remain here, provided you pay extra for the privilege of turning this house into a sewage farm.”

“I have previously been paying you thirty-five shillings a week,” said the Professor blandly. “In future you will receive twenty guineas for a similar period.”

With profuse thanks the landlady bowed herself out of the room..

Tantum continued his work with remarkable energy. Now he was busy concocting a pink-tinted paste ; now he was ransacking a dilapidated volume of De Quincey.

“De Quincey’s the man,” said the Professor excitedly. “He seems to have had a devil of a lot of dreams. Our pills must be made from opium, hashish, an Indian poison not mentioned in the British Pharmacopœia, powdered lobster, and a concentrated form of sponge cake, mixed together with some suitable adhesive. We must watch the results carefully, and before long we shall be able to produce certain pills for certain kinds of dreams. We must eliminate nightmare on the one hand and death on the other. Death ? ” Here the Professor chuckled. “It would never do to invoke a dream without an awakening, a dream associated with undertakers and obituary notices ! ”

At dinner that evening the Professor was extremely jovial. He kept all the boarders convulsed with laughter, and gradually worked round to the subject of dreams.

"I simply love dreaming," said Miss Flower, a pretty little typist who made a point of buying and reading all the sevenpenny novels she could get hold of. "I love dreaming really nice dreams, but the trouble is——"

"Pardon me," said the Professor. "I happen to know what the trouble is. I'm going to change all that. In future you will be able to dream at will by simply taking a pill."

"You're joking," said Miss Flower.

"Indeed I am not," replied the Professor, rolling his bread into pellets. "What I say, I mean most emphatically. Pale people and ruddy people, plain people and pretty people, will all be able to dream deliciously, so that sleep will have new charms for the sleeper, charms that will be full of pleasant and exquisite surprises. The pomp of Babylon will be revealed again, and all the old glory of the past will yield up its fragrance in a subtle dream. The sleeper will imagine himself reclining in a gondola, listening to the gondolier's romantic song. He will be able to participate in all the glamour of an Arabian Nights story, and he will be able to roam at will through the starry firmament. In short, my dear Miss Flower, there is nothing that the dreamer will not be

able to see and revel in, when once he has taken one of my Dream Pills."

When dinner was over the Professor returned to his room and placed a few pills and one or two other articles in a small black bag. He gazed affectionately at his fine head reflected in a mirror, put on his coat and came downstairs. He looked into the drawing-room, caught the eager eye of Miss Flower, and murmured mysteriously: "I don't expect to be back to-night." Then he hustled to the front door and hailed a taxi as if he had been hailing a car of the Gods.

Twenty minutes later, Tantum was treading upon a carpet that seemed to be made of moss. "My dear good fellow," he said, warmly grasping Mr. Banks' hand, "you will be delighted to hear that I have what I may call the preliminary Dream Pills with me. You will be astonished——"

"No, no, Professor. Nothing you could do would ever astonish me now. Your head, you know, your head."

"You are too kind. And the money?"

"Here it is," said Mr. Banks. "Allow me to present you with a cheque for five thousand pounds."

"Don't mention it," said Tantum, looking at the cheque, biting it, and putting it in his breast-pocket.

"In future," said Mr. Banks, "when the scheme is in working order, we will share profits. Does that arrangement suit you? I think it is quite fair, is it not?"

"It is not only fair," replied the Professor, with much excitement, "but it is an extremely generous proposal. By the way, as I have brought the pills with me, perhaps you would like to try one. If so, I propose to remain with you. When you wake I shall be able to listen to your account of the dream."

"Let me see the pills," said Mr. Banks.

The Professor opened his bag and took out a small box.

"In there," he said with a smile, "are the wonderful Dream Pills."

"Are they quite harmless?" inquired Mr. Banks.

"Practically," replied Tantum. "Later on I hope to be able to eliminate all danger."

"Don't you think, Professor, that under the circumstances you had better make the experiment yourself and allow me to notify the dream?"

"No, no! The pleasure must be yours. As a matter of fact, it would require something like a thousand of these pills to kill an elephant."

"I am not an elephant," said Mr. Banks solemnly.

"True, but what I meant to infer was that these pills are really perfectly harmless if taken in small quantities."

"Very well," said Mr. Banks. "I will take one of these pills. Just hand me that glass and jug of water, will you?"

The Professor did so, and in another moment Mr. Banks had swallowed one of the Dream Pills.

"I feel sleepy," said Mr. Banks presently.

"It is beginning to work. Marvellous, isn't it?"

"Professor, I have a pain."

"That's the powdered lobster and concentrated sponge cake. Don't be alarmed. The dewy balm of sleep is already on you. The Goddess of Dreams takes from her loom. . . . Don't snore so loudly, my dear young friend. Many a pleasant dream has been frightened away by excessive snoring."

Presently the snoring ceased. Mr. Banks was smiling sweetly.

"Splendid!" whispered the Professor. "Couldn't possibly be better. . . . Couldn't possibly——" But the great inventor of Dream Pills fell asleep, and never finished his remark.

When Tantum woke up, Mr. Banks was still smiling, and his breathing was regular.

The Professor bent over the young man and gently shook him. "Wake up, my friend, wake up."

"Hallo!" said Mr. Banks, opening his eyes. "Are you there? I'm 1248 Central. Wrong number. Ring off, please."

The Professor coughed. "My dear young friend," he began, "you're not on the telephone. You're talking to me, to the maker of Dream Pills, you know."

"Oh, yes! Awfully sorry. I had a Dream Pill, didn't I? Well, I must tell you that I've had a most extraordinary dream."

"That was inevitable," said the Professor with a smile. "Tell me all about it."

The dream was narrated with so much vividness that the Professor remained silent some time after Mr. Banks had ceased to speak.

"Wonderful!" said Tantum at last. "I really must congratulate you on having met Helen of Troy under such pleasant circumstances. I think I may modestly claim that the experiment is entirely successful?"

"Entirely," replied Mr. Banks. "A factory must be built at once where the Dream Pills may be turned out in millions. When that is accomplished, we must secure, as I said before, an establishment in the West End where we shall be able to convert the Dream Pill boom into a sort of religious cult. After that wholesale advertisement, the winning over of the Fleet Street scribes, and, after that, a mammoth fortune for us both."

When the factory was built and hundreds of thousands of boxes containing Dream Pills were in readiness for distribution, and when the Professor had secured an imposing room in Bond Street, people were surprised to see men going about with large white balls on their heads. The surprise increased when balls were discovered on the top of letter-boxes, on telegraph poles, on taxis and motor-buses. There were two words on all these white balls, written in large

letters—"DREAM PILLS". Every one was asking what these pills were, and every one was anxious to try them. Just when curiosity was at fever heat all the London dailies had a full-page advertisement, and in the centre of the page—"DREAM PILLS"—that was all. The next day detailed advertisements appeared, and London went mad about Dream Pills. Every one, except babies in arms, seemed to be spending five shillings for a box of dreams.

"We've made a hit this time," said Mr. Banks to the Professor; "but we must keep on advertising. I intend to send a fleet of airships across London and all the big towns next week, and each airship will distribute papier mâché balls with our pills inscribed upon them."

Dream Pills went on booming. Ten huge factories sprang up and poured forth countless dreams, and the originators reaped a rich harvest. The business extended to the four quarters of the globe, and even savage tribes in Central Africa were buying Dream Pills.

When the boom was at its height, the crash came.

"Banks," said the Professor, staggering into the room so rich with Eastern hangings, "Banks, it's all up! Before long we shall be responsible for something like thirty-five million deaths! The Dream Pills kill. I have only just discovered it. My God, what have we done? Thirty-five million!—Stop the damned, rotten, pernicious, wicked, frightful, death-giving

Dream Pills! Banks, the people are swarming through the streets. They are coming here. Hark! A bell rings!"

A bell did ring. Professor Tantum's head had struck it in one of those marble halls devoted to light refreshment.

"Wake up," said the manageress. "We don't allow gentlemen to sleep here."

"I beg your pardon," said the Professor, rising. "I must have been dreaming. Glass of hot milk and a piece of lunch cake, please."

THE HILL OF STARS

BROWN had suffered from shell shock. It had been a bad case, and at one time the doctors despaired of his recovery. He had been moved from hospital to hospital, and had received a variety of medical treatment. When he reached a Convalescent Camp, near Plymouth, he showed no trace of shell shock, and his nerves seemed to be in excellent condition.

Brown didn't look attractive in hospital blue. His boots were too big for him, and they turned up at the toes. His trousers bagged at the knees. He might have worn, like Hole of the Concert Party, smart civvie boots, a silk collar and black tie. He might have pressed his trousers under his mattress, but Brown didn't care twopence for his personal appearance. He seldom went into Plymouth, and never picked up a girl. So far as his military life was concerned, he seldom spoke to the men unless spoken to. But there was no side, no priggishness, in his aloofness. He was naturally a quiet man. He never grumbled, and was invariably alone.

When a tremendous storm blew down most of the tents, Brown rose from the rain-sodden, wind-rent

canvas, and, wrapping a blanket round his bare legs, quietly strolled away to the Y.M.C.A. where he fell asleep as if nothing unusual had occurred. He was generally to be seen with a large envelope filled with manuscripts. He was always writing, and seemed quite unconscious of a paper shortage. Men stared at his minute calligraphy with considerable interest, and asked Brown if it really were handwriting or the performance of a highly trained electric needle. Notwithstanding Brown's peculiarities he was popular, and probably the best known man in Camp.

Brown had an extraordinary love for the country. He would go swinging through the gates immediately after dinner, and he did not hand in his pass at the Police Tent until 10.30 p.m. He went quietly to bed in the dark, and if there were any men awake in the tent they would invariably see the glow of his pipe.

After a week of uninterrupted rain there followed a day when there were many patches of blue in the sky. The wind was in the west, and there was an opalescent mist over Dartmoor. Brown could see the Moor from the P. T. field, and when he saw the tors bathed in autumn sunshine he wanted to shout for joy. During the morning he worked absent-mindedly at what was known as the cinder fatigue. He wasn't thinking about cinders. He was thinking of Dartmoor, and longing for the time when he could draw his pass and feel the Moor road beneath his feet.

Shortly after dinner Brown left the Camp gates, where two military police stared at him, winked, and murmured something about "square pushing" in the country.

Brown walked along the main road that led to Tavistock. He passed the George Hotel, and then took the second turning on the right, which, by hill and dale, brought him to Bickleigh with its typical West country church and old-world cottages. He crossed the Plym, which rushed along in a hurry, swollen to double its normal size by the recent heavy rain. He looked at Shaugh Mill where he had spent many a pleasant evening with a gamekeeper, his wife and two pretty daughters. At this point the road rose at a steep angle, and Brown was forced to slacken his pace until he had passed the village of Shaugh and had reached a rough-hewn stone cross on the Moor. This cross suggested no devout Christian thought to Brown. It simply marked a memorable spot where he had a magnificent view of Dartmoor, when that pagan soul drank deep from Devonshire's cup of beauty.

Coming in the opposite direction Brown met an elderly man who was talking to himself. He was walking quickly, and his arms were swinging like pendulums. He swung his arms so far forward and so far backward that they suggested, quite apart from his legs, a means of locomotion.

The men stared at each other. Both stopped instinctively, and without knowing precisely why they did so.

"I am looking for the Hill of Stars," said the elderly man. "I've been looking for it for years, and some day I shall find it."

"The Hill of Stars," murmured Brown, fascinated. "I've studied many Dartmoor maps, and cannot recall the name."

"Maps!" exclaimed the old man excitedly. "Did you ever find anything worth finding on a map? A curly black line indicates a river, a dot a town, and what looks like the fine hair of a caterpillar a mountain. Maps? Why, sir, they mock the beauty of Nature. You will never find the Hill of Stars on a map, because the Royal Geographical Society doesn't know of its existence, but I know."

"You know of something you have never found?" said Brown.

"Yes," replied the old man with emphasis. "The Hill of Stars exists, but it only exists for those who are prepared to find it, for those who love Nature so well that they are ready to sacrifice all for the final joy Death itself cannot destroy."

The old man paused for a moment, and appeared to be weighing in his mind the desirability or otherwise of continuing his conversation. He who sought a mystic hill evidently came to the conclusion that Brown was worthy of his wisdom, for he continued :

"Yes, the Hill of Stars stands somewhere on Dartmoor, and when I find it, when I stand on top, I shall experience the most wonderful rapture, for up there—"

"Yes," said Brown eagerly, "go on."

"Up there," continued the old man, "I shall be even as the Gods were on Olympus, as the Deities brooding over the Himalayas. On the Hill of Stars there is no death. I shall become part of the World-Soul. I shall know all."

For a moment the old man was silent. Then he said eagerly: "Have you ever heard a kind of joyous music on Dartmoor?"

"More than once," replied Brown.

"Does an apple orchard in bloom against a clear blue sky make you intensely happy? Does Dartmoor at night, when the tors are purple and grey, whisper of strangely beautiful things? Does the white road lead not only home, but to a magic gate beyond?"

"Yes," said Brown. "I once caught a glimpse of that magic gate beyond home."

"Good!" exclaimed the old man. "Some day, perhaps even sooner than I, you will open that gate, and, having opened it, find the Hill of Stars."

Then the old man moved on with a long swinging stride. Brown gazed for a moment at the retreating figure. "I, too, shall look for the Hill of Stars," he said, continuing his journey.

An hour or two later, Brown was attracted by an inn called the Jolly Maid. A warm admirer of Cervantes, Fielding and Smollett, these writers had taught him to regard an inn, even in these deplorable days of tied houses, not so much as a place of rest and refreshment, but as a piquant source of adventure. Brown looked at the swinging and creaking sign. The maid painted thereon didn't look particularly jolly, and the artist had certainly laboured unsuccessfully at his task. Wind and rain had played the very devil with the staring eyes, for one was blue and the other owed its dull red to sundry drippings from the lady's hair. The cheeks, however, were still rosy, and the mouth, blurred a little at the corners, suggested the smile of a simpering Pekinese.

"Looking at the sign-board?" inquired the landlord coming to the door with a clay pipe in his mouth.

"Yes," replied Brown, "but as the good lady is not particularly attractive, I'm coming inside."

"Do!" said the landlord with sufficient enthusiasm to suggest that guests were few and far between, and their company particularly desirable on that account. "Owing to the food restrictions," continued the landlord, "I can't give you exactly a feast, but you're welcome to salt bacon, cheese and beer. Not supposed to sell beer to hospital patients. Heavy fine if we're caught, but if we were to carry out all the instructions the Government imposes upon us, life wouldn't be worth living."

The garrulous landlord then led Brown into the parlour, where there was a cheerful wood fire and many pictures on the walls presented by the proprietors of popular whiskies. Brown sat down in an easy chair, and noted with pleasure the pungent scent of burning wood, while mine host busied himself in preparing a meal.

"Perhaps," said the landlord ten minutes later, "you won't mind if I join you. I'm what you may call a sociable man, and it gets on a fellow's nerves to pass day after day without meeting anyone to talk to. Old Paxton comes here every evening for a drink, but you can hardly call him good company, for he's deaf and dumb. I'm inclined to think he takes advantage of his infirmities. He trades on his failing memory by sometimes coming here and forgetting to pay for his drinks. I say forgetting, but in my opinion it is more a matter of artfulness than anything else."

"I shall be glad of your company," said Brown. "Do you live here alone?"

"Practically," replied the landlord pouring out a jug of foaming ale, and then proceeding to cut the bacon with much energy. "Been wounded?"

"Shell shock," said Brown.

"Ah!" exclaimed the landlord, "nasty thing shell shock! I'll be careful not to bang doors or make any unnecessary noise. Funny thing how noise affects

men suffering from shell shock. Seems to bring it all back again, doesn't it ? ”

“ I met an extraordinary man on my way here,” said Brown, ignoring the landlord's reference to the symptoms of shell shock. “ He's trying to find on Dartmoor the Hill of Stars.”

“ Oh, you met him, did you ? ” replied the landlord. “ Mad as a March hare. Curious man though. Interesting to talk to, but cranky, very.”

“ Then the Hill of Stars doesn't exist ? ” inquired Brown, unable to conceal his disappointment, and perceiving at once that he was dealing with one likely to ridicule anything super-normal.

“ Of course it doesn't exist,” said the landlord. “ That man you met has got a bee in his bonnet, and doesn't know it. Why, he actually believes in fairies, and told me the other day that the ancient Druids believed in them too. Fairies ! Says he can see them dancing on the Moor. Says they look like rings of rainbow light. Now I believe in honest beer and a pipe of honest shag, and till I'm fit for the churchyard these things, with a roof over my head, food and firing, are good enough for me.—Hello ! What's the matter ? 'Pon my word you've turned as white as the table-cloth. 'Tis clear you haven't got rid of the effects of shell shock.”

Brown was sitting bolt upright, and his left hand, which rested on the table, was shaking violently. “ There's something damn queer about this place,” he

said slowly. "What's that noise? It sounds exactly like the jabbering of a monkey."

"Oh, that," said the landlord lightly, "is something in another room, a kind of pet, and yet not a pet: something which ought to have been human, but isn't."

"I'm going to see for myself," said Brown, staggering to his feet. "I'm going to open that door."

"No!" shouted the landlord. "You'll do nothing of the kind. Just sit down quietly. Your nerves are a bit upset, that's all."

"But I can't stand that noise. It's horrible," protested Brown.

"I'll soon stop it," said the landlord. "Sit down."

Brown sat down while the landlord opened a door sufficiently wide to admit his person, and shut it rapidly as soon as he was on the other side.

While Brown sat shaking in his chair the jabbering noise increased. It seemed to be a shriek of stormy protest, and it was mingled with the landlord's oaths.

"Stop that damn row!" shouted the landlord. "You won't stop, you ugly devil? Very well, then, take that."

Brown heard the crack of a whip. The jabbering became demoniacal, and a chair was knocked over. There seemed to be some kind of struggle going on in the next room. The whip cracked again, followed by a low, piteous cry, the opening of a door, and then silence.

A moment later the landlord came into the parlour with a bleeding face. "It's all right now," he said facetiously. "The Jolly Maid's gone out for an airing. Maybe she'll hunt round for the Hill of Stars. Feeling better? The colour's coming back again. Sorry you've had a bit of a fright, but we shan't be disturbed now."

Brown and the landlord pulled their chairs close to the fire and lighted their pipes.

"I must confess," said Brown, "that noise gave me a nasty turn. I have often found on Dartmoor that which is beautiful and that which is sinister too."

The landlord grunted. "Nerves," said he. "Don't give way to 'em. Just try a glass of this sloe gin. It's good stuff of my own making, and I haven't forgotten the almond flavouring."

The landlord poured out two glasses of sloe gin, and the wood fire shone upon the ruby-coloured liquid.

"Here's to the Hill of Stars," said the landlord, raising his glass and laughing. "A queer toast in a queer place."

"To the Hill of Stars," replied Brown seriously.

Brown left the Jolly Maid in time to see the west flooded in a golden sunset. He stood looking at it from the top of a steep hill that leads to Meavy. "The sun has left behind him many fields of daffodils," he said with rapture. He looked at the misty splendour of Sheep's Tor, and saw the gleam of water at Burrator. The keen air was scented

with peat and gorse, and the white road before him seemed to whisper, "Come!"

"If I could only find the Hill of Stars," said Brown, now walking along briskly. "That fool of a landlord, garrulous but brutal, doesn't believe in its existence, but I do!"

Brown suddenly left the road, and followed a winding path across the Moor. The wind rustled the dry heather, and now and again a bird uttered a frightened note, and sought a more remote shelter.

Brown went on walking mile after mile without the least fatigue. A full moon had risen, and the sky was powdered with a host of stars. Venus seemed to be tiptoeing on the crest of a distant tor. Now and again a moorland pony crossed his path on its way to a secluded valley where the wind was less keen.

"I shall climb that tor," said Brown, looking at a tor he had not seen before. "It looks like some huge, brooding god, and may even be the Hill of Stars itself."

When Brown reached the top of the tor, he sat down on a granite boulder. He looked up at the Pleiades, and saw a kite of stars. "If I had a long, long string," said he, "millions and millions of miles long, I would pull that kite all over the heavens. I really believe I have found the Hill of Stars. Such happiness, such beauty——."

Brown paused. He did not finish what he intended to say, for horror took away all power of speech. He

heard once more the monkey-like jabbering that had so moved him at the inn. Some one, some thing, seemed to be playing with little stones. His brain went out to those falling stones as if his thoughts concerning them were elastic feelers that desired to know their exact position. He had felt like that in France. His mind then seemed to have become part of the velocity of the shells, just as it now became morbidly engrossed in the little stones.

“Little stones!” exclaimed Brown, perspiration streaming down his face. “What if they become big stones—rocks? What will happen if a granite boulder crashes against another in its fall?”

Suddenly Brown saw a strange figure that spoke the jibberish of a monkey, a figure of a child of fourteen with the emaciated face of a ghoulish old woman. There was something so revolting in this horrible freak of Nature, this half-human, half-bestial form, that Brown felt the desire to shriek at the top of his voice. But he sat helpless with the sweat streaming down his face.

The figure went on throwing stones, keeping up at the same time a shrill and fretful jabbering. Brown saw in silent agony that she was picking up larger stones, and flinging them down the side of the tor with much violence.

“Unless I kill her,” said Brown, “she will kill me. I must go to her. I must take her in my arms—and, and fling her down, down——”

Brown tried to rise. "I cannot get up," he said dismally. "Oh, God! She's tearing at a huge boulder. She's moving it. How it rocks, sways—it's rolling down the side of—"

Brown did not hear the crash of that mighty boulder. Before it reached the bottom of the tor he had opened the gate beyond home and found the Hill of Stars.

THE INCARNATION OF PAN

ONE summer day I had spent many hours in a Dorsetshire wood. A thousand sights and sounds delighted me. I had taken a book out with me. Can any one who can read the printed page when everywhere trees and flowers are telling tales more wonderful than those written in books?

It was nearly ten o'clock in the evening when I rose to go. I walked slowly, loath to leave this charmed spot. I had often on such occasions been troubled with a certain amount of curiosity at an old house on the outskirts of the wood. There were strange stories about the present owner. Tales told in country houses over a tankard of brown ale by rustics who, like the owners of the old house, added a bit here and there with each additional telling. I had listened to these stories with incredulous amusement. From the old accounts the present owner was in league with the Devil. So many people who choose a way out of the general running, are said to be in league with the Devil.

That particular night I stood looking at the moon longer than usual. The blinds were not drawn

in a lower room, and the bright light and wide-open window enabled me to see the interior with remarkable clearness. I saw, sitting in a chair, the most remarkable-looking man I have ever seen. On the hearth-rug in front of him were strewn a number of flowers, and on either side of the chair were piles of books. He was reading with extraordinary eagerness and rapidity. Sometimes a finger would race along a line, stop, and then go on again. Sometimes he would give a low, haunting laugh, and at other times he would bang the open book with his fist. Now he closed the volume, rose, and lifted from the hearth-rug a number of flowers, as many as he could hold in both arms. He buried his face in them and talked to them in a soft, caressing way. Then he laid them gently down again and walked briskly to the open window and looked out. Our eyes met. There was something eerie in that look of his. Then he smiled, with almost the same effect as when a dog shows his teeth. It was a malignant smile, and yet for all that irresistible.

He stretched forth his arm and beckoned to me.

I drew closer. There might have been cords to that beckoning finger of his. I could do no other than obey his silent summons.

"Well, Stranger," he said, in a curiously musical voice, "so my doings interest you?"

"I must apologise for intruding upon your privacy," I said. "Your doings certainly did interest me, and

I hope that will be sufficient excuse for my looking into your charming room. You have a love of flowers?"

"I love Nature," he replied simply. "You walk abroad rather late in the evening, Stranger? The birds have rolled themselves into feathered balls for many hours now. I keep late hours, too. *So much happens in a wood at night!*"

When he mentioned the word "wood," I saw a strange expression flit across his face. It was the expression of a lover who has suddenly discovered something of what Love may mean.

"Stranger, the hour is late, and perhaps you have far to go, but if you will come in for a little while, I may be able to entertain you after my own fashion."

I readily accepted the invitation. A moment later I was sitting in a chair opposite to this extraordinary man.

"Few people come to this wood," said my host, "but I often see a little bald man with a green butterfly-net. He races round trees; he tramples down flowers; he falls into the brook, but nothing matters so long as he catches butterflies. The small coloured creatures, blossoms that have learnt to fly, get into his net sometimes, and the bald-headed man smiles as he drops them into his poison-bottle. Oh, that abominable poison-bottle! It takes so long to kill. I know that old man goes home and sets his specimens out on a cork with pins and strips of

paper. Presently he will transfer them to his collection, when they might have been drinking honey from the flowers. I should like to put that man into a big poison-bottle and pin down those fat, eager legs and arms of his ! ”

My host spoke with grim earnestness. Then he went on with even more vigour :

“ I once saw a man who has a mania for collecting the green-brown eggs of blackbirds and the blue-brown eggs of thrushes. He has hundreds of them in large drawers. All those eggs came from the love-making of birds, Stranger. Ah ! when spring comes there are such happy marriages in birdland, such joy in building homes. And then the eggs come. Spring-time is calling, calling in the woods, but the birds sit so patiently upon their eggs. They know why they keep them warm, and they sing little snatches of song for very joy of keeping them warm. Then comes a heavy foot-fall, and cruel fingers dive into the nest. The treasures of coloured shell, with life and song for many a golden spring, are taken away, pierced and blown. Oh, Stranger, I weep when I think of that man’s collection of eggs, and of all the sweet and wonderful song lost for ever to the world ! ”

My friend lifted again the flowers as I had seen him do when watching him from the wood. Once more he spoke to them in a strange language I could not understand, and it seemed that the flowers answered him. He smiled at what they said.

"You play?" I queried, looking at a piano in one corner of the room. "Perhaps you will favour me with something from Chopin?"

"I will play," said he, "but my music is not like the music of composers such as you name. They thunder in the bass, trill in the treble, juggle with sharps and flats, and all the time their music comes from innumerable hammers inside their instruments! My music comes from yonder wood, from distant caves by the sea, from mountains shrouded in mist. Listen!"

He rose and went to the piano and rested his long fingers on the keys. He did not strike the notes. He caressed them. I find it difficult to describe what followed. For some time I was too utterly surprised to appreciate fully what I heard. When the feeling of surprise lessened I leant forward and listened intently, afraid lest the slightest sound should escape me.

I heard the music of the wood. Words seem dull and cold to describe my impressions. I heard the soft wash of the sea upon the shingle, the quick gurgling rush as it swept between the rocks and then lay still in pools. I heard the breaking of little waves and the fall of those blue-white water-curls. I heard the song of trees, the rustle of dry autumn leaves, the soft fall of rain, and then the sound of raging forests, lashed and twisted by the fierce wind. "I will take you by force," the wind seemed to say.

"I will lay you low, O stately ones of long standing! I will hurl you down. I will tear out your secrets. I will hurt you in your hidden places under the earth." And the forests answered back with thunderous voice: "Lay your strong cold arms about us, and twist our hair and make our bodies rub together. We are full of the joy of battle, O wind!" Thus was the war waged between the forests and the wind. Then came the soft falling of leaves and the jubilant song of birds, and last of all came the gentle sea-song of the trees.

My host still sat at the piano, his head bent forward. I thought there was nothing more to come, till I felt the most wonderful charm of all—the silence of woods. It was the silence of awakening life, the mad uprush of sap, the preparing of colour and perfume.

Then my friend rose with a gentle laugh. "Little children cannot be taught that music. No hitting of fingers, no laborious counting aloud, no practising of five-finger exercises will teach those melodies. No man with shaggy hair, with small conservatories rearing the red-rimmed eyes, can write about its technique. It is the oldest music in the world and the sweetest. What think you, Stranger?"

But he gave me no time to answer him, no time even to thank him. He was sitting once more in the chair opposite to me.

"What a pity it is," said he, "that so many scientists run in grooves and fly round with labels and

paste whenever they want to chronicle a fact. I don't care who or what the man is, if he is going to be really great, he must have a keen imagination, in other words he must have a sense of poetry. The analytical is good in its way, but it is the long way and not the short way to knowledge. Darwin proved that mankind descended from monkeys, but he did not prove the missing link question. He left out of consideration the half-human stage, the satyrs, for instance, of ancient Greece. He called them myths. Myths are often missing links."

"Your suggestion," I said, "is ingenious, but you see nothing has ever been found to prove your theory. One skeleton of the upper part of a man and the lower part of a goat——"

I stopped suddenly. My host had quickly brushed back his hair from his forehead. I stared, leant forward, and then drew back with a sharp cry.

"Well, Stranger, what is it? Why don't you go on? What were your thoughts just then?"

"I thought," I said, my voice shaking a little, "how much you resemble Pan. The thought was a foolish one, for Thamus, when sailing near Paxos, was commanded by a mighty voice to proclaim: 'Pan is dead'."

"Pan died in Arcadia, my Stranger," he replied, rising to his full height and showing his teeth in a malign and horrible smile. "Pan lives again to-night. *I am the great God Pan!*"

Days and weeks went by since my first visit to this strange man. I found myself constantly thinking about him. Sometimes I regarded him as a fanatic, a hopeless madman who had gone mad through loving Nature too well. At other times I was half inclined to believe his assertion. He certainly had abnormal powers, and, moreover, he bore a striking likeness to Pan as we popularly picture that God. But Pan of old was a sportsman and delighted in the chase. This new Pan wept over stolen eggs and babbled tenderly to flowers. My interest in the matter became so keen that I eventually resolved to spend a night in the wood, in the hope that I might see him.

On the night chosen I concealed myself between two boulders in such a way that I could see a certain clearing in the wood, and yet at the same time was not likely to be observed.

I sat hidden in this place for about two hours, when I heard the sound of voices. Then I saw Pan slowly walking along with his arm round a slight, dark woman. Here was a comedy I had not bargained for. Pan in love with a Devonshire maid! Surely that would correct his madness, or, if you wish to be cynical, lead his madness into a more human and more easily understood channel.

They sat down against a tree, and I must confess I played the part of eavesdropper without much shame.

There was a look of distress upon Pan's face. The woman caressed his hands and looked up at him with a smile from time to time.

"You tell me," the woman was saying, "that you love me, and yet cannot, if you would, marry me."

"Even so, little one. You see you do not understand. There are voices calling me that you do not hear. There are people you cannot see waiting for me to play to them. Oh, the call of the woods and the caves and the mountains! Cannot you hear their voices? Now, now listen!"

"Dear dreamer, there is no sound save the wind and the cracking of twigs and the sound of running water."

"Ah!" exclaimed Pan with a long-drawn sigh. "You must try to forgive these vagaries. Draw close. Perhaps I may forget, shut out their voices, and only hear yours!"

Pan bent down and pressed the woman's face between his hands and kissed her on the mouth.

"Oh," said the woman softly, "what a night this is! You will put away your dreams and your fancies? I will serve you and make you always happy. I will bring sick birds for you to make well again. I will be like a stream wandering through your life. It shall be there always for your refreshment. Drink deep at all times. You can never exhaust my love for you!"

Pan did not speak. I saw tears run down his cheeks. Twice his right hand went to his breast.

The third time he drew out something and put it to his lips. I heard music sweeter than the song of birds. And all the time Pan wept—tears that fell into his pipes and made the notes tremulous.

I saw the woman quickly loose her hold. A look of intense fear came into her eyes. Something strange and wonderful was happening. The woman watched it all, her body swaying to and fro. Then she uttered a shrill, piercing cry and rushed, as if possessed, through the trees and out of sight, one word ever upon her lips, shrieked out in awful terror—"Pan!"

It was Pan indeed. He had undergone a change. I saw his goat-beard swaying in the wind and horns jutting out from his forehead. His bare skin was hard and red, and the lower part of him was like a goat. Still he played, and the sound of his music became more sweet. And through the wood there echoed the wild, mad cry of "Pan"; the woman shrieking the name with a darkened brain. And all the time Pan wept.

JAPANESE

THE COMING OF JIZŌ

To those who cannot walk he stretches forth his
strong *shakujo* [sacred staff];
And he pets the little ones, caresses them, takes
them to his loving bosom.
So graciously he takes pity on the infants.

—*From the Japanese*

OKAZAKI, the curio-seller, sat asleep in his shop—a grey, sombre figure with a nodding head. Children came and looked at him, smiled, and went away; but for the most part the dreaming of Okazaki seemed to cause no particular interest in the street. No one was surprised that this old man could not keep awake on a hot summer afternoon, and even the dusty images of the Gods about him had grown weary of waiting for prayers. They, too, seemed to doze in the sunshine, seemed to rock gently on their shelves.

Presently Kinumé ("Golden Plum-Flower") came down the street. She looked timidly at the seller of curios. After hesitating a moment, she stretched forth her little flower of a hand and said: "Be honourably pleased to wake up."

Okazaki opened his eyes. "Alas!" said he, "that an old man should dream away a summer day and

keep a young lady waiting ! But kindly take my many years into consideration and pardon the shortcomings of a foolish old man."

"I wish to buy one of your Gods," said Kinumé, peeping into one of her big silk sleeves.

The old man stood up, smiling. "You wish to buy ? Dear me ! I haven't sold anything for such a long time that you take me by surprise. You wish to purchase a God ? What God ? I have so many in my miserable establishment. Here is a lovely golden Buddha sitting on a lotus. See how he smiles, as if Nirvāṇa were a smiling matter ! Buy not Fudo or Emma-O, for they have such ugly faces and will but frighten you with their august hideousness. Should you love the sea, I have Isora, and if your honourable cooking be not to your husband's liking, then purchase this very fine image of Kojin. Personally, asking to be forgiven for expressing my unworthy opinion, I prefer the Goddesses to the Gods. See how many faces Kwannon has, and how many succouring arms. With such a number of eyes she can always see, and with such a profusion of ears she can always hear—inestimable advantages when one considers that several of our deities are wayward and are inclined to be a little indifferent to human supplications. Here is radiant Benten, Goddess of Beauty."

"Okazaki," said Kinumé, "I asked for a God, not a Goddess."

"Ah! pardon me. The tongues of old men are apt to wag too freely. Had you not graciously interrupted me, I should have so far forgotten myself as to offer you this old Chinese tea-caddy, so rich in flowers and birds that it almost breathes forth a perfume and a sweet song."

"I want an image of Jizō."

"A very excellent choice, for is he not the most gentle and lovable of all the Gods? He can cause the most excruciating toothache to cease. He can calm a troubled sea, and he can play with and protect the souls of little children."

Kinumé suddenly sat down on the matting and hid her face in her sleeves.

The old man looked distressed. "I fear I have talked too much. The shop is hotter than the place where *gaki* dwell. How your shoulders tremble, like the wings of a butterfly, and how pitifully you weep!"

The curio-seller took down a fan and commenced to sway it gently to and fro.

"I am well again," said Kinumé, looking up with a smile. "You touched my poor wounded heart just now, but you did not know. Okazaki, I have lost my child, and I want to purchase an image of Jizō that I may pray to him, that I may ask him to be kind to my little son, Taro. What do you think he is doing now?"

Okazaki drew in his breath, and with profound solemnity answered: "He is chasing a burnished dragon-fly."

"How do you know, old man?"

"I know because I know," replied Okazaki, blinking at the sunshine.

"If I only knew as you know," said Kinumé, "I should be happy."

"Ah!" said the curio-seller gravely, "peace will come to your sad heart if you will pray to Jizō long enough. He is kind, he is good, and most assuredly does he play with the souls of children. Here is an image of him. Let me wipe away the dust. There! Is he not a divine father and mother in one?"

Kinumé took the figure in her hand, caressed it, and looked into the calm, smiling eyes. "Oh, Jizō," she said softly, "be good to my little one!"

When Golden Plum-Flower had paid for the image, held it gently to her breast, and passed out of the shop and down the hot, dusty street, Okazaki said: "Surely a loving woman's heart is the sanctuary of the Gods," and having uttered these words, he fell asleep.

As Kinumé walked home, choosing the shady side of the road lest the hot sun should give Jizō a headache, she chanced to pass the Tea-House of a Thousand Joys. She paused and looked at this gay building, gazed into it, for most of the sliding screens had been removed. In one apartment she saw a woman in a deep-blue kimono, radiant with silk-worked cherry-blossom, dancing before a small male audience, while geishas, nodding and smiling, played the

samisen. When the dancing ceased there was a murmur of applause. One man caught the dancer's hand, caressed it, and looked eagerly into her laughing eyes. That man was Kinumé's husband. She knew the meaning of that touch, that look, but she only smiled, pressed the image of Jizō closer to her breast, and went on her way.

When Golden Plum-Flower reached home, she made a small shrine for Jizō. She placed him so that when the *shoji* was drawn he could look out upon the garden, at the lake and bubbling cascade, at the paths of silver sand and the clouds of blue hydrangeas. "You will be happy there," she said quietly, "looking out upon such a peaceful scene."

Presently she arranged flowers before the shrine and burnt incense. When the evening came she lit a lantern, and, when she had gazed for a long time at the smiling face of Jizō, she knelt down on the spotless matting with her head bowed, her forehead touching her extended hands. "Do you know what it is to lose an only child?" she murmured softly. "Do you know what it is to lose a husband's love? Oh, my heart is a-quiver with sorrow! The herons fly home in the evening across the purple sky. The stars watch their going, and the deep waters mirror their shadows. They go home, Jizō, home; but I have no home now, only a house where love has vanished. My husband and my child have gone, and it seems scarcely worth while to prolong my

miserable life. Jizō, how fares it with my little one to-night? Has he fallen asleep in your arms? Did you sing to him? Did you tell him a story before his bright, wondering eyes closed? Oh, that I might come to the country where he is, to see him smile, to hear him laugh, Never-Slumbering-One, to know that all is well!"

Hanshiro, Kinumé's husband, crept into the room. "Rise, little one," he said gently.

Golden Plum-Flower rose to her feet, but pressed back the hand that would have caressed her arm. "No, no!" she exclaimed quickly. "Be pleased not to touch me." The colour rushed into her cheeks and her eyes filled with tears. "You were at the Tea-House of a Thousand Joys this afternoon. I saw you touch the dancing-girl, and the look in your eyes then was the look of a lover."

Hanshiro told his wife that she must have made a mistake; but there was something in the purity and infinite sadness of Kinumé that made lying useless. "It is true," he said presently, "perfectly true. She is called O-Kon ("Deep Blue"). For days I have heard her voice calling. She has tapped at my heart: she has entered, and all my love is hers."

"And Taro, did you not remember him?"

"When I saw O-Kon-San I forgot everything else."

"Yes; you forgot everything else. Will you be honourably pleased to go away and never come back again? I do not ask where you will go—whom you

will see ; but know, husband of mine, that my love will never change. I shall never forget, and in a little while it may be that I shall be able to forgive. *Sayonara.*"

"*Sayonara,*" replied Hanshiro. For a moment he felt sorry ; for a moment he was prepared to blot out the deep-blue jewel of the Tea-House of a Thousand Joys. Suddenly he seemed to see O-Kon dancing, O-Kon looking close into his eyes. "*Sayonara,*" he murmured again, and, without looking back, he passed out of the house, never to return again.

When the middle of July came, Kinumé made preparations for the Festival of the Dead. It was with difficulty that she walked to the hill-side cemetery where the earthly remains of Taro rested, for her body ached, and she could scarce put one foot before the other ; but, in spite of much physical suffering, she felt a growing sense of peace in her heart.

On her return from the cemetery she met her friend Suzu-Ko ("Little Bell").

"You are ill," said Suzu-Ko kindly. "I do not like those too bright peony-buds in your cheeks, and there is a strange, far-away look in your eyes. Please take a jinrikisha and keep to your room. I will come and see that you are properly looked after."

"I am only very, very tired," replied Kinumé. "No, I will not take a jinrikisha. To-night I shall

see my little son, and I shall grow well again when I have seen him."

"But is not your little one dead?"

"He has gone where Jizō is. To-night is the first night of the Festival of the Dead. So many souls will come to our town to-night, and Taro will come too."

"Kinumé, is it possible that you believe in these things? There is the *Bon* dance, the *kag-zen* [shadow-feast], the red and white lanterns, but I did not think that anyone really thought that the dead come back again."

"I do," said Kinumé simply. "Jizō has been pleased to make my love big and beautiful, deep and far-reaching. Already Taro has left the Dry Bed of the River of Souls. He is coming over the sea, over the hills, trotting along the dusty roads to me. He always came when I called him. I am calling now. He is saying, ever so many times: '*Mother, mother, I am coming, quick, quick!*' To-night I shall see him, and what joy will leap out of my hungry, waiting heart."

Kinumé bowed gravely, smiled, and went on her way.

It chanced, as Golden Plum-Flower sat in her garden shortly after sunset, that Okazaki passed down the road, murmuring to himself, as was his wont.

"Okazaki," said Kinumé, "do you remember one who bought from you an image of Jizō?"

"Indeed I do," replied the seller of curios. "My customers are not so many that I should ever forget them."

"Would you like to see my little son?"

"But he is dead, is he not?"

"They all say that—all, because they do not understand. Be pleased to come into the garden and sit on the Stone of Easy Rest, and in a little while you shall see Taro."

Okazaki slowly entered the garden and sat down on the Stone of Easy Rest, close to Kinumé. He saw the lanterns swinging on the gateway and on the corners of the house.

"You have found Jizō a good God?" he inquired presently.

"More than good, dear old man. You said that if I went on praying to him peace would come. Peace is coming into my heart now."

"Yes," replied Okazaki; "some of the Gods fail us, but never the gentle and loving Jizō. Look at the moon rising over the sea. I wonder who blew that big bubble into the sky? How the fire-flies shine and how the *semi* sing!"

"Okazaki," said Kinumé, her voice shaking a little, "there is no doubt that Taro will come, is there?"

"It is a long, long way," replied the curio-seller. "He must be such a little ghost."

"Could not I go to meet him? Could not I carry him in my arms?"

"No, I am afraid not. We can but wait. He knows the way to you, but you do not know the way to him."

The moon shone on the dusty road, a white, winding ribbon that lost itself in the mist of a distant hill.

"Hark!" said Kinumé. "Cannot you hear the murmur of far-away voices—a wonderful whispering that comes from yonder hill?"

"I hear nothing—nothing, only the sound of the sea."

"But the murmur I hear is not of the sea. It is a white company of ghosts, talking, talking—how eagerly they talk! Now I hear the rustle of their long garments and the tread of their gentle footsteps."

"I hear nothing but the wash of the sea, O-Kinumé-San."

"Look! Look! They are coming down the road, such a gathering of happy souls. How fast they come, and how they smile when they see the lanterns hung out for love of them!"

"I see nothing but an empty road," murmured the old man, looking anxiously at Kinumé.

"Thousands are passing by the garden gate now, but I see no children—no Taro." Her voice broke. "Perhaps, after all, he has not come."

"It is such a long way from the Sai-no-Kawara—such a long, long way," said the curio-seller tenderly. "Can you wonder that his little feet grew weary, that he fell asleep by the way?"

"All the souls of the dead have passed by now," sobbed Kinumé. "My little one could not quite reach me." For some time the old man and the young woman remained silent. Then Kinumé suddenly sprang to her feet. "Look!" she cried eagerly. "Look! Jizō, clad in blue and brown and green, is walking along the road, and resting on his bosom is my little one! Jizō is calling me. Taro turns his head and smiles."

The old man tried to restrain Kinumé, but it was useless. She ran to the garden gate, and, bowing before the Divine Playmate of children, took her child in her arms and pressed her cheek against his hair.

When Okazaki reached the road, he saw Golden Plum-Flower lying like a broken flower in the dust. He gently carried her into the house, and placed the image of the ever-smiling Jizō in her arms.

THE WHITE BUTTERFLY

Where the flowers sleep
Thank God ! I shall sleep to-night.
Oh, come, butterfly !

YONE NOGUCHI

TAKAHAMA lived alone in a house behind the cemetery of the temple of Sozanji. He was an old man. No one in the village knew precisely his age ; indeed, they knew little about him. He was regarded as amiable but at the same time eccentric, if not a trifle mad. His extraordinary reticence lent fire to the neighbours' imagination. They wove fantastic tales about him, and not a few spoke bitterly of him as one who had shirked his responsibilities. Many were of the opinion that ice and snow mingled in his veins, because he had never married and, as far as they knew, had no knowledge of women. They believed that it was the duty of every man to marry and to bring up a family, unless he took Buddhist vows.

Takahama for the most part lived the life of a recluse. In the daytime he worked in his garden or sat there in solitary meditation. In the evening he would sit on his veranda and play the *biwa* and sing songs, or he would retire to his room and by the

light of an *andon* pore over Buddhist scriptures and occasionally write short poems known as *tanka*. He prepared all his simple meals and did everything that was required in the house with scrupulous care.

One day when Takahama was sitting in his garden under a red *torii*, close to a lake almost completely covered with lotus, his little girl friend, Ayamé, came to him with a broken doll.

"See," said she wistfully, sitting down by the old man's side, "my doll is broken, my doll is dead." Then, as if afraid of her next words, she whispered, "There is no one I love quite so much as this 'Tokutaro-San' [boy doll]."

"Ah, that is indeed sad," replied the old man. "There is nothing for it but to present your Tokutaro-San to Kojin, for he loves and protects the remains of dolls. He lives in the enoki tree. I have such a tree in my garden. It has a warm brown hollow in the trunk. We will lay your doll there, Ayamé."

Takahama rose, took the child by the hand, and with much gentleness and many prayers he laid the broken remains of the doll in the hollow.

As they stood sorrowfully by the tree, Ayamé said: "Where does love go when dolls die?"

"Little one," replied the old man softly, "love doesn't go anywhere; it lingers, waits always. The same love will come back again when later on you nurse not a doll but a child of your own. Yes, Ayamé, love lingers, waits always."

Then they returned to the *torii* and the old man and the girl sat down.

"Takahama," said the child looking up at him, "are you really mad? Be honourably pleased to pardon my seeming rudeness, but so many people in the village have said you are."

Takahama smiled; such a radiant smile it was. "We are sometimes called mad if we choose the by-ways and do not walk along the main road of life. I am called mad because I have never married, never known the sweetness and blessing of a wife and child."

"Dear old man, then I think you are just a little mad—only just a little. It was foolish of you never to marry. I shall not be so foolish. Look. Do you not see those beautiful butterflies over there? How they saunter and dream in the sunshine! Tell me something about butterflies."

"There are some who say that butterflies are the souls of women and some that they are the petals of flowers come to life. After all, the souls of women and sweet-scented petals of flowers are much alike."

"Takahama," said the child eagerly, "why not marry a butterfly—the soul of a woman? Dear old man, it would be lovely to have a butterfly for a wife. While you ate your rice and drank your tea you could watch her daintily sipping her repast from the flowers by your side. You would want such a small *futon* for her to lie down on at night, such

small, light coverings to keep out the cold. I could make everything for her. Your fingers are much too large and bent and stiff to fashion such tiny things."

"No," said Takahama solemnly, "I will not marry even a butterfly." Then, noticing the child's disappointed face, he continued: "You see, Ayamé, a butterfly only lives for a short time. I should be a widower before the summer ended."

"That would not matter at all. No one would be able to call you mad then, and besides, you would have pleasant dreams and happy things to think about."

"I have pleasant dreams and happy things to think about, little one."

"Oh," said the child, drawing nearer, and looking up at him with wonder and concern, "there are rivers running out of your eyes! I do not understand."

"Ayamé, such wise people have said, 'I do not understand'. Some day you will know the meaning of *mono no aware wo shiru* [the ah-ness of things]. Some day you will know that the most beautiful and happy things, the joys that stir us most deeply, make us weep too. They are breezes from the Land of the Yellow Spring fanning our cheeks. Almost before we have felt their exquisite sweetness they are gone. Ayamé, I am waiting for my dreams to come back again."

"How long have you waited?"

"Fifty years."

"I don't think your dreams will ever come back now."

The old man smiled. "Yes, yes, they will. Little one, be honourably pleased to repeat the word, 'Akiko'. I have a fancy to hear you say it."

The child obeyed. She repeated the word quickly, over and over again. While she did so Takahama leant forward, a wistful and beautiful expression upon his wrinkled face.

"There, is it not a pretty name?" said the old man proudly.

"Yes, it is pretty. But why do you like me to say it?"

"'Tis a fancy of mine, little one, just a fancy."

Ayamé sat silent for a long time, holding Takahama's hand. She was trying to think out something in that little head of hers. She knitted her brows and her red mouth pouted. She cast furtive glances at the enoki. Suddenly she scrambled to her feet, ran to the tree, and took out her dilapidated doll. She held it above her head and shouted fiercely: "Kojin shan't have my doll. If the blue sky is full of grasping hands I shall hold my Tokutaro-San very tight, and nothing, no one, shall take him away."

Then with a solemn bow and burning tears in her eyes she walked defiantly out of the garden, both her chubby arms pressing the doll close to her breast.

"Yes," said the old man to himself when the child had gone, "grown-up people hold even more tightly

to those whom they love, but their arms are soon left empty for all their holding, and there comes an ache in the heart beneath."

Then the old man rose to his feet and carefully examined the lotus within easy reach. He looked for perfect blossoms. When found, he picked them and walked slowly to the garden gate, gazed down the road and into the cemetery.

When assured that no one was about, he softly opened the garden gate and tiptoed into the cemetery. When he reached a certain moss-covered tomb he knelt down and closed his eyes for a long time. Without opening them he stretched forth his hands, and his fingers wandered over the stone erection. This action seemed to give him a certain amount of pleasure, for a smile lit up his face.

Then he opened his eyes and filled the central cavity in the stone with water from the water tank, and in the two small holes on either side he lit joss sticks. Having done these things he took out the dying flowers from the bamboo cups and left in their place the freshly-gathered lotus blossoms. The blue smoke of the incense floated over the moss-covered stone, to be lost in the brighter colouring of the sky.

Takahama had performed these duties daily for fifty years, never by any chance changing the order of his devotions or leaving out one of his loving duties. As the seasons changed, so changed the flowers. Spring saw cherry or plum blossom in the bamboo

cups ; summer, lotus or azalea or iris ; autumn, a bright flare of maple leaves ; and winter, white chrysanthemums when there was no snow on the ground, yellow ones when the air was thick with the flakes of Yuki-Onna.

Shortly afterwards Takahama was taken ill. There was no one to tend him. In fearful pain he crawled out of bed to eat a few grains of rice, and even more slowly crawled back again. He was delirious, and in his delirium talked of many strange things. He shouted and sang and sobbed. It was his shouting that attracted the attention of Sonjo, who happened to be passing by the old man's garden. Sonjo loved Takahama, and hastily entered the sick man's room.

"Takahama," he murmured, bending low over him, "you are extremely ill. How long have you been like this ?"

But Takahama neither recognised his friend nor understood what had been said to him. He went on shouting and singing and sobbing.

Sonjo wasted no more time in words. He busied himself in the simple apartment, found a medicine chest, and prepared a cooling draught.

Sonjo was only successful in pouring a little of the medicine down the raving man's throat, but it quieted him. The old man tossed wearily on his *futon*, occasionally clutching the quilts piled above him, though the summer day was extremely hot.

The young man knelt by his side and watched him till his friend fell asleep.

"Good, very good," murmured Sonjo. "He breathes heavily. Now I will leave him in order that I may fetch a doctor. All will be well with Takahama presently." Then he left the house.

Takahama had not fallen into a deep slumber. Soon after Sonjo had left him he opened his eyes and looked about the room.

"Ah!" said he, "I have been ill, but I am well now. I wonder how long I have been ill."

His thoughts troubled him. After a pause he cried: "Oh, I have been neglecting my love! How long have I been neglecting her? I pray with all my heart for strength now. Lord Buddha, hear me. I must go to the cemetery. I must go now, now."

With difficulty he crossed the matting and took out all the flowers from a vase at his bedside. With uncertain steps he walked down the garden path and into the cemetery.

He knelt down by the moss-covered tomb. "These are the last flowers I shall be able to bring you, beloved, the last time I shall pour you out fresh water. Akiko, you understand, you understand. I am stepping forth into a new and glorious garden where the flowers never fade, where I shall find you. See, the incense floats to you. It is like the garments you used to wear."

Takahama wound his arms round the stone, his head pressed close against it. His body shivered. A cruel pain gnawed within. "I am coming, Akiko, after fifty years," he murmured, his poor brave face twisted with the pain. "Open the gate of the garden where you are. I breathe the scent of wonderful flowers. Oh, the magic of this white sunshine and the calm of the deep blue sky above! Akiko, your little hand. Ah!——"

The body ceased shivering. It lay as still as the stone beneath.

It was thus that Sonjo and the maid, Ayamé, found him.

"What is the matter with Takahama?" sobbed the child.

"Nothing is the matter with him now, Ayamé. Our friend is at peace. Takahama has gone to his last resting-place."

A large white butterfly settled on Takahama's face. Ayamé opened her fan and tried to drive it away, but it came back again and again. Then it suddenly seemed to vanish into the moss-covered tomb.

The child knelt down and with her fingers tore away the moss from the stone. She read aloud the word, "Akiko," and an inscription telling how she died at the age of eighteen.

"Now I understand," said Ayamé. "Takahama's dreams of happiness have come back again. The

name of his love is Akiko and that white butterfly we saw was her soul. Oh, Takahama, Takahama, there is no ah-ness of things for you now."

THE VENGEANCE OF MINE

MATSUMURA and his pretty wife, O-Yoshi, lived in a Japanese village so quaint and altogether beautiful that it seemed like Fairyland itself.

These good people often asked Miyahana, the storyteller, to come and tell them one of his wonderful tales.

"Dear lord," said O-Yoshi, holding her husband's big brown hand, "I have a fancy to hear Miyahana tell one of his stories to-night."

"Presently he will come, little one. I have asked Miyahana to call to-night. What shall the story be? Of love, or war? War, I think."

"No, no," replied O-Yoshi, laughing. "Let it be a true love story. All the best love stories contain much in the manner of war, so we shall both be satisfied."

A moment later, Miyahana came into the room, bowed ceremoniously to his guests, and sat down by a low wooden table, cooling his heated face with a big fan.

"Hitherto," began Miyahana slowly, tapping his fan on the small table, "I have made up the stories you have been honourably pleased to listen to.

This evening I am going to tell you a story which I have never told anyone else before. It is about the early days of my youth when I fell in love."

"Fell in love?" echoed O-Yoshi. "Oh, how funny to think of you ever being in love! I know you have a pet frog."

Miyahana smiled. "Pet frogs, O-Yoshi, are what love sometimes leaves behind."

After the story-teller had partaken of a little refreshment, thus he began :

"When I was a young man I was employed in my father's rice fields. I worked hard at hoeing and reaping, and in the early summer I stood all day long in mud and water. My father employed many men and women in his rice fields, and it chanced that I fell in love with a pretty maid who made her work a pleasure. She loved standing in the water with her kimono tucked round her and a cotton cloth tied over her head to keep off the hot sun. There was nothing that she would not do in the rice fields, even to threshing the rice with flails or tying it to short poles. But she told me that the joy of her work lay in seeing the rice fields a vivid green and in feeling the water, cool and bubbling, round her pretty feet. Her name was Miné, and she was beautiful as a child is beautiful. I can hear her laughing now, as she splashed the water with one hand or let the green sprouts caress her arms, bare as they always were when at work. She would sing when

others were silent, and it was her singing that went straight to my heart and made me realise the magical power of a woman's voice.

"In those days, my good friends, I found that emotion had a way of tying my tongue. Others chatted and laughed with Miné, even played with her, while I remained silent and apparently morose. My feelings were deep and true beyond question, but my actions often savoured of foolishness. I conceived a trifling act of courtesy towards Miné when I lay at night upon my *futon*. In the morning that would-be courtesy was something so clumsy and ineffectual that it made the dear woman I loved laugh at me and even jest about me to the other workers in the fields. And all the time my love for her grew to such an extent that I deeply resented the numerous attentions Miné received from the other young men, who, I am convinced, had much more pleasing manners than my own, but less genuine feeling.

"One day I went to a priest, who was not like other priests in that he took an interest in my love affair, and went so far as to forget the Lord Buddha's teaching and to instruct me in the art of love. 'Love,' said he, 'must not lie hidden in your heart. It is not a thing to dream about. Love must grow and act, if you would prosper. Speak to Miné, and seek an opportunity of rising superior to your rivals.'

“One night an opportunity came. I found myself working side by side with Miné. ‘Little maid,’ I said, ‘have you never guessed that I hold a secret in my heart?’

“Miné stopped working and looked at me. The corners of her pretty mouth curled into a smile. ‘So?’ she said. ‘Then perhaps you will tell me what that secret is. I am a poor one at guessing secrets, especially those that lie very, very deep down.’ And Miné laughed.

“‘Miné,’ I said, ‘your singing seems to have quickened something in my heart. Something is growing there; something is coming into flower; something is calling out for you, and only you, to come.’

“‘Then I won’t sing any more, and perhaps the trouble you have been suffering from will cease. Listen. I do not love you. I can never love you. You are too proud and sullen. Please do not say any more about it, or I shall not work in your father’s rice fields. I love Toba. See, there he is with the sunshine falling on his hair. Oh, he is a handsome and splendid man! You, Miyahana, are not handsome. I could never marry anyone with cold eyes and a hard mouth that never seems to smile.’

“I looked at Toba’s bent figure. Presently he stood up and smiled across at Miné. ‘Supposing Toba died,’ I said, ‘what then?’

“The child in Miné suddenly disappeared. Her eyes flashed. I saw her fingers twisted together like

small white snakes. 'Ah!' she hissed, 'so your wicked heart grows jealous! I see in your hand a dirk. You think to kill Toba, the brave, strong Toba. Fool!'

"Her words stung me. They were unjust. I had no such intentions. I ought to have retaliated. I ought to have known that a woman sometimes respects a man for his anger. Instead of hot words I went on working, and when I chanced to look up, I saw Toba and Miné standing together. There was an angry scowl upon Toba's face.

"A few days later, a dreadful fire broke out in our village. It happened late at night. I was awakened by a dazzling light and by the noise of women and children running down the street, crying and wailing pitifully.

"I rose and hastily left my father's house. My one thought was for Miné's safety. When I drew near her house I saw that it was on fire. Even the pine trees of good fortune that stood at the garden gate were wrapped in flame. I saw, too, that Toba was joining in a drunken dance with some of his companions, laughing and jeering at the tongues of fire as they licked the woodwork or shot into the air a cloud of dancing sparks.

"I rushed into Miné's room. A heavy beam had fallen upon her ankle. She was making desperate efforts to release herself, but her foot was badly crushed, and her poor little face was wet with the

pain from which she was suffering. I bent down and flung aside the smouldering beam. Then I stretched forth my arms. She shook her head. 'Tears were streaming down her cheeks. 'Where's Toba?' she said. 'Why doesn't he come?'

"'Miné,' I said, 'I think Toba is ill. Perhaps he's helping his aged mother. Be sure he would have come if he were able to do so.'

"Once more I stretched out my arms. Miné was too weak from pain to offer any resistance now, and in another moment she lay in my arms.

"Now I stumbled across the matting, shielding Miné's face from the hissing and roaring flames. The heat and smoke were terrible. Twice it seemed that I must needs fall with my dear, frail burden. Only the Gods know how I reached the street that night. I had no sooner done so than I heard a sharp, rending sound and saw Miné's home totter into a heap of charred wood.

"Now the cool air revived me. It was good to feel Miné in my arms. There was something splendid, triumphant, about that double line of flaming houses, but when I heard the people calling to each other, when I heard a mother wail over her dead child, I knew that the fire was a cruel monster—I knew that it had made, with all its golden hair, an awful compact with the wind that night.

"Suddenly I saw Toba lurch towards me. 'Who's that?' he shouted.

“‘Let me pass!’ I cried. ‘Can’t you see that I am carrying a suffering woman to a place of safety?’

“Miné stirred in my arms. ‘Toba,’ she whispered softly. ‘My Toba, why didn’t you come for me?’ She opened her eyes and looked at him. I felt her body quiver against my own, as she gave vent to sobs that did not come from the pain of her crushed ankle.

“‘Come?’ shouted Toba. ‘Why, your house was on fire. It was about to fall. I should have been burnt to death. As for you, Miyahana, we will settle our account later.’ With that Toba burst forth into a drunken song and staggered away.

“I took Miné into my father’s house and dressed her ankle and gave her a medicine to relieve the fever. She watched me with a curiously wild expression in her eyes. I did not talk to her. There was a sweet joy in doing little things for Miné. Sometimes I would cool her forehead and lips with water, sometimes I would bring her flowers that she might hold them in her hot, restless hands.

“‘Miyahana,’ she said at last, ‘why did you try to shield Toba? Why did you try to hide the truth from me?’

“‘Because, dear suffering one, I knew you loved him. It must be a cruel pain when—when the loved one does not come in the hour of need. Do not be hard on Toba. He was drunk. He has a weakness for *saké*, otherwise he would have come and played a

man's part. See, you have moved the bandage. There, now it is right again. Try to go to sleep. You will be better in the morning.'

"'I cannot sleep because of the pain,' she said wearily.

"'Ah! your poor foot will soon be well again.'

"'I was not thinking of that pain, Miyahana. I wish the beam had fallen on my heart and killed me when—when he did not come! I thought Toba loved me. Toba is a coward. Cowards only love when the sun shines. When the sun seems to creep down in the night and go mad and set houses on fire, when there is danger, cowards do not love then.'

"Suddenly I was aware of Toba's presence in the room. He stood with his arms folded across his strong chest. 'Come,' he said to me, 'we will settle our account now.' There was a smile on his handsome face as he said those words. 'You will have good cause in future to remember that Miné belongs to me. You look tired, Miyahana. You will sleep soundly in a garden to-night, my friend. Your face will look well, surrounded with blossoms and the moonlight upon it. I pray you walk slowly down the long white road to the Land of the Yellow Spring. There are no rice fields there, no Minés, no hungering fires, no carrying of another man's love!'

"Toba's words sounded far away. I heard them as in a dream. I was watching the sudden change on Miné's face.

“ ‘Toba,’ she said softly, ‘come near to me. Put your arms round me ; caress me.’ ”

“Toba did so. The old sweet smile came back to her face again, and he murmured tender words it made my heart ache to hear.

“ ‘You wish to kill Miyahana,’ she said gently, ‘Miyahana who saved my life? Yes, yes, I know you do, Toba. But his life is more precious to me now than yours. It is you who will walk along the road to the Land of the Yellow Spring. Oh, my brave heart, my splendid fellow who was afraid of fire! Your love, it will change just as often as a *kakemono* is changed in a room. Was my life so poor a thing that you could not come and save me? Love does not flash on the surface in fine weather. Love is the strong arm that comes in time of trouble. It was so easy to make love to me in the rice fields. I wanted something much more than that.’ ”

“In a moment a knife shone in Miné’s right hand and was pressed home into Toba’s breast. The blow was swift and sure. Like a tongue of flame it shot to its mark. Toba rolled for a moment from side to side, then fell dead upon the matting.

“Neither of us spoke for some time. I knew in my heart the meaning of it all. I knew that it was the mystery of a woman’s love wounded beyond endurance and turned into vengeance.

“ ‘Miyahana,’ said Miné, ‘you saved my life, and now I have saved yours. Justice in her turn will visit

me, but before I go I want you to know one thing. I want you to know that I have learnt too late what your love is. Oh, Miyahana; my dear one, my dear one ! ’

“Nothing availed against inexorable justice. I pleaded all in vain that Miné was in a fever when she killed Toba. Justice without a smile or a frown laid her down cold and still and beautiful in her last long sleep. But the old love is with me as strongly to-day as it was when I first met Miné. And now, wrinkled old man as I am, I keep a pet frog because Miné loved frogs and was kind to them in those far-away rice fields.”

LITTLE MOTHER

IN a London shop window sat a life-size Japanese doll, representing a boy about seven years old. He wore a kimono of emerald green cotton, gay with many *hana kaga* or flower baskets. To the brown *obé* or sash the shopman had pinned a large ticket, informing the passer-by that this imposing personage could be purchased for the modest sum of two shillings and tenpence halfpenny.

For a long time the boy had sat in the shop window, and for a long time he had attracted a good deal of notice. More than once he had been taken out of the window by the garrulous shopman for the closer inspection of possible buyers; but mothers shook their heads at him and preferred to purchase for their children English dolls with absurdly pink cheeks, hair the colour of bright yellow silk, and eyes bluer than forget-me-nots. They had no real beauty whatever, but their eyes could be made to open and shut; their garments could be taken off and put on again, with the assistance of a much harassed nurse, and by squeezing them in a certain place they would emit a squeaky noise that was supposed to represent "Mamma" and "Papa". These were attractions that

appealed to the British matron, while the Japanese boy, with his wonderful smile and dark, oblique eyes that were full of life without any kind of mechanical device, struck her as a little queer, a little uncanny, and in consequence hardly fit for an English nursery.

So the Japanese boy, who had had his head turned and turned by the sticky hands of many children, went back to his place in the window among his flaxen-haired rivals, among drums and hoops and trumpets and Jack-in-the-boxes, among models of butchers' shops where the meat was excessively gory, and boxes of bricks that could be made to display Daniel in the lion's den or baby Moses in the bulrushes, and gaudy ducks that could be made to swim in a bath of water by means of a small magnet. The Japanese boy went on smiling. Some one would come for him some day. Some one would understand; but until that time came he was quite willing to wait in the shop-window where there was so much to see—the children with their nurses, the dogs drinking out of a china trough, the postman and policeman on their rounds, and an endless stream of traffic in the street. Every Monday morning a ragged man played on a cornet. He played, among other pieces, "The Lost Chord," and played it so badly that he seemed to have lost all the chords of the original setting without, so to speak, troubling to make a note of it. But to the Japanese boy it was wonderful, almost as wonderful

as a red-coated monkey who danced to the accompaniment of his master's barrel-organ, and who suddenly snatched at his hat and held it out for a stray copper or two.

The Japanese boy loved above all things to see the approach of the lamp-lighter. He came with a long wand and made beautiful yellow flowers bloom all down the street, magical flowers on long stiff stems. They only lasted a few hours ; for this maker of bright golden flowers always made them fade in the early morning. The Japanese boy was watching the sudden appearance of these blossoms when he felt the large hand of the shopman grip his waist and carry him into the shop.

He sat smiling on the counter. A lady stood opposite to him. She had a sweet pale face with kind grey eyes. He had seen that face before, seen it in a dream he had had in a toy-maker's shop in far Japan. He wanted to hold out his arms, to speak, to tell her of his dream. All he could do was to sit perfectly still and smile. He heard the lady talk to the shopman about the Feast of Dolls. He heard her use Japanese words. He heard her tell the shopman that it is quite possible to give Japanese dolls souls if you love them enough. The shopman only said : " Oh, yes ! " and rubbed his plump hands together. He had never heard of the story of Pygmalion, nor of similar classic tales veiling a profound but universal truth. To him, dolls were so much merchandise, so

much stock to be got rid of at a profit. They were so much wax and paint and sawdust and clothes—nothing more. He did not deal in souls, and he was a man entirely devoid of imagination. He went on saying: "Oh, yes!" and continued to rub his fat hands together as if he were in the habit of washing without soap and water. Then he said: "You would like to purchase this doll straight from Japan? I can assure you, madam, it is a bargain at two shillings and tenpence halfpenny. We have a fine stock of English dolls . . ."

The lady interrupted him. She told the shopman that she did not want an English doll. She produced her purse, and placed three shillings on the counter. The shopman stopped washing, took up the coins, dived into the till, and handed the lady her change. Then he wrapped the Japanese boy in tissue paper and stuffed him roughly into a large cardboard box. Then followed brown paper and string, and a moment later the lady went out of the shop with a big parcel, and the Japanese boy went on smiling underneath the tissue paper, feeling excited and happy.

For a few days the Japanese boy missed the excitements of the shop-window. He missed the lamp-lighter, the red-coated monkey and the cornet-man. But in a little while he forgot these things, for greater wonders were in store for him. He was given a Japanese name, the name of Koko, and three

children played with him. He had been told by a wise doll he had met in the shop-window that children were often cruel. She informed him that boys sometimes stuck pins into their sisters' dolls so that they bled sawdust, and that sometimes these heartless wretches would go so far as to plan and carry out a terrible execution. Koko, so far from experiencing any kind of cruelty, was treated with the utmost care. The two boys told him stories, while the girl, who was an invalid, also told him stories, but of a much more wonderful kind. He often sat up in bed with her, and the undulation of the bedclothes seemed like fairy palaces and snow-clad mountains.

One day the little girl went away. She was carried away in a big wooden box with brass handles, and on the box were a great many white flowers. Koko watched her go. He wondered why all the blinds were pulled down, and why the lady who had bought him, and whom he now called "Little Mother," cried so much. Through a chink in the blind he saw the flower-covered box carried down the garden path by men in long frock-coats. The box was gently put into a small glass house behind which stood a line of carriages. Koko did not understand what it all meant, till he saw Little Mother come out and her husband and the children all dressed in black. Then he knew by the sound of stifled sobs, by the flutter of handkerchiefs, by the creeping away of the house of

glass, that his little friend was going to the Land of the Yellow Spring to play with Jizō.

Koko was left alone in a darkened room for a long time. Presently the carriages returned, but the little glass house did not come back again. The door of the room was softly opened and Little Mother came in. She took Koko in her arms. He looked up at her, and presently his face was wet with her warm tears. "My little girl," she said quietly, "has gone to be with Him. It is better so. She will have no more pain. She is happy now." As Koko lay in the arms of Little Mother, his head pressed close to her breast, he felt her love for him. It was much more wonderful than the lighter of lamps, the maker of golden flowers. His body was warmed by hers. He began to feel strange things he had never felt before. He was beginning to understand the greatest sorrow of all, and beginning to see that sorrow is not all tears, but has something beautiful, radiant too. Little Mother's love had kindled a soul in his tiny being. She had made a flower bloom within him which would never fade. He too might ride in a house of glass one day. He too might follow his friend and find her playing in a big garden where Jizō is.

In course of time much of the sadness passed away. The boys grew up and went into the world, one to become a distinguished artist and the other to build organs that poured forth the music of

the masters. They returned to the old home occasionally ; but when they did so Koko was aware of a difference in their attitude towards him. Always polite, always tolerant, they seemed to regard him as rather a strange person that must be petted as one pets a cat or dog. There were a few visitors who smiled incredulously at him as he sat on the floor or leant against a cushion. They were people who did not understand, who were worldly-wise, who were somewhat like the London shopman. But Little Mother, she understood. She had given him life, a soul, because her love was the kind of love that can, and does, perform miracles.

When Koko was twenty-eight years old he experienced many changes. The hair of Little Mother and her husband was now white, but though age had gently crept upon them they were still busy with their work. Still their pens flew to ink-pots, and still many pages were filled with their writing. Koko continued to sleep in Little Mother's bed, and when the nights were cold she would furnish him with additional wrappings. Little Mother often took him out in the garden. In the autumn they would pick red leaves together, and in the summer he would lie in her arms looking at a glorious bed of Shirley poppies. Every evening Koko was taken out on the veranda for a smoke, for he was never allowed to smoke indoors. Koko won a kind of local fame, and as the years went by, the story of his doings was

known for miles around. When Little Mother and her husband came to London, within a stone's throw of the British Museum, Koko came too. On an old landlady's chair he made his bow, and woe betide those tactless visitors who feigned to ignore his presence. These visits were few and far between, and Koko was always glad to get back to his home in the New Forest where the Japanese treasures were, and where every nook and cranny of the house, every corner of the garden, reminded him of Little Mother.

What a day it was for Koko when he received a visit from several Japanese nurses. How they talked to him without the kindly services of an interpreter. The cherry trees were in full bloom when they came, and every now and again the wind seemed to turn the floating petals into butterflies. He had tea with these laughing women from his own country. No sugar, no milk—just three rather noisy sips, as if he were drinking wisdom and joy out of tiny, shell-like cups. What a joke life was after all! Little Mother seemed to see its funniness too, as the sunlight danced upon her shawl. He wanted to take that happy little figure in his tobacco-pouch and live with her for ever in Japan, on some island where the pine needles, singing softly together, would work the silver stars into pictures, where they might always see the Holy Mountain like a mighty lotus poised in the air.

When the nurses returned to hospital, Koko received from them a number of post-cards with kindly greetings. With the help of Little Mother he wrote letters in reply. She guided his hand, and often consulted Hepburn's dictionary. They made many blots together. They laughed a good deal, but still the letters were written, and with them was enclosed a photo of Koko. There was no need for a photographer to tell him to smile before he plunged beneath a velvet cloth and pressed a rubber ball. Koko was always smiling, and so he was always ready to have his photo taken.

The war sadly depressed Little Mother and her husband. Little Mother would sit before the drawing-room fire, looking pale and frail, and tell Koko that all was not well with England and her Allies. Her eyes would flash, her small body would become tense with excitement. She saw terrible defeat in the near future: Germany triumphant, and all our terrible sacrifice vain. She would put her arms round Koko and tell him that it was a thousand pities that we did not allow Japan to fight for us in the West. Only such an event, she said, would bring success in the end. It was plain to see that Little Mother was affected by the war, and when one of her sons went to the front, she began to fail visibly. She would forget some of her household duties. She would take Koko out for a smoke no less than six times during one evening, and she

would sit pen in hand for an hour without writing a word.

One day Little Mother did not get up to breakfast. She held a telegram in her hand, a telegram that had come from the War Office. She lay still with her grey eyes fixed on the ceiling. She did not hear the shrill cry of a cottager's parrot. Neither did she hear the sound of the old man pumping water for the house, a noise which usually distracted her. "Koko," she said after a long pause, "Koko . . ." Then her voice faded away, and her hand moved restlessly over the counterpane. Koko lay in her arms, his head a little on one side as if he were listening. "Koko," said Little Mother again, "I shall be going to sleep presently, the last sleep of all, and I want you to come with me. Will you be afraid if my arms are round you all the time?"

Koko did not answer. He still lay with his head a little on one side as if he were listening, the old sweet smile on his face. People came in and out of the room. There was a strong smell of medicine which a tall vase of lilies could not dispel. The doctor wanted to take Koko away, but Little Mother's arms clung about him as she whispered: "You must not take my child from me."

At the last Koko grew afraid. The room seemed to become suddenly cold. He saw the door open and a strange Figure enter with a lantern more wonderful

than those fire-flowers he had seen in a London street. "Little Mother," he said, speaking for the first time in his life, "Jizō, the God of Japanese children, has come for us. Shall we go now?" No one heard him but Little Mother. She turned toward him and caressed him. There was a wonderful smile on her face. "Yes," she said softly, "we will go out together. My arms will be round you all the way."

Little Mother never spoke again. Koko was tightly pressed against her breast, and together they rode in a little glass house to the village churchyard. But they do not sleep there. When the moon is full, and when the nights are still, villagers have peeped through the gorse hedge and seen in the sloping garden, by the bed of Shirley poppies, the figure of Little Mother with Koko in her arms.

THE STREET OF THE GEISHA

Tozo, an old Buddhist priest, lost in profound thought, had the misfortune to take a wrong turning and to find himself in the Street of the Geisha. When he had discovered his mistake he was for retracing his steps, but instead of doing so he chuckled to himself, and thought how great was the difference between the Street of the Geisha and the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha.

It was a narrow street, gay with flickering lanterns. Tozo gazed upon them with disapproval. On one he read, "*Kinoya: uchi O-Kata*" ("The House of Gold wherein O-Kata dwells"), and on another, "*Niyotsuru*" ("The Stork Magnificently Existing").

"Ah!" exclaimed Tozo, "what lights for the moths of wickedness! How these dancing-girls minister to those things that are not seemly to contemplate. Muhammad knew what he was talking about when he said: 'O assembly of women, give alms, although it be of your gold and silver ornaments; for verily ye are mostly of Hell on the Day of Resurrection!'"

A merry peal of laughter came from one of the houses, followed by the sound of girls talking rapidly

together. "O fools of a moment's mirth," said Tozo hotly, "make you a pilgrimage to Ise, and pray that the Gods may show you the wisdom of silence and the folly of babbling tongues!"

Tozo moved on again, eager to tread a more respectable thoroughfare. The many-shaped lanterns danced in two long lines before him, but by fingering his beads and murmuring a fragment of a sūtra, the old man was able to set aside all mundane matters. He was about to leave the Street of the Geisha when he met his friend Akira.

"You here!" exclaimed Akira. "Have you not called this street 'The Street of Don't Go Down'? Surely you should be in your temple, either fast asleep or in a doze over your devotions."

Tozo laughed. "My friend," said he, "it is better to find a priest who has strayed by accident into this deplorable street, than one who, like yourself, comes here for a set purpose. Akira, believe me, nearly all the tribulations of this world may be placed at a woman's door. When she beckons, when she calls, pay no heed to her importunities. As for the geisha, flee from her bright eyes and chattering tongue, from her little hand that for ever pours out wine, from her seductive dances, for such things are of the Evil One and lead to destruction. Be not moved by a snow-white arm that peeps from a big silk sleeve, nor by lips red as a poppy but pernicious as opium. Rather than contemplate such things, study and master

the Lotus of the Law, for it has been truly said of women—”

Akira touched the old man's hand. “Look,” he said, “how dry the skin is. 'Tis ink rather than blood that runs beneath such parchment. You are an estimable priest, Tozo, but allow me to say that you do not show the toleration of your Master toward women. You are bitter and narrow where a woman is concerned, and all because, my dear friend, you have been dead but not buried for quite a long time. *Sayonara*, O pilgrim in the Street of the Geisha !”

“*Sayonara*,” replied Tozo gravely. “When you have discovered the futility of human desire, and above all when you have had your heart crushed by a woman, come to me and I will show you the Way of Peace.”

Akira stood for a moment watching the receding figure of the priest. He pitied the old man, but he did not know that Tozo pitied him and wept. “Well,” said Akira gaily, “it is fortunate for this world that we are not all priests, otherwise there would be no Street of the Geisha.”

Akira stopped outside a house where the lantern was shaped like the egg of some fabulous bird. He looked at the characters inscribed upon it, and read : “Flower-Bud of Ten Thousand Dreams.” When he had perused the inscription several times, he pushed open the slide of a door that set a gong-bell ringing.

Nishimura, the teacher and mistress of the house, came forward. "Ah!" she exclaimed, recognising Akira, "be honourably pleased to enter my miserable dwelling. All the girls are out at present, attending various festivities in the town."

"All are out?" murmured Akira dejectedly.

"That is to say all except Kohana." Nishimura laughed knowingly. "Can it be that you wish to see Kohana?"

"Nishimura," replied Akira, laughing, "be pleased to show me Kohana."

"So?" said Nishimura. "Many have called here for a similar purpose. Many have expressed the desire to marry Kohana, and all have offered to pay me liberally for the privilege, but Kohana only laughs. She finds life so funny. Oh, Kohana is a deep one!"

Nishimura invited Akira to follow her. She pressed back a sliding screen, bade him enter a small apartment, took a handful of coin with profuse thanks, and left him.

When Akira sat down, the light from the *andon* was so dim that at first he fancied he was alone. In a moment or two, however, he discovered Kohana peeping at him from behind her fan. She was dressed in a kimono the colour of a mountain dove, and the lovely grey background was relieved here and there with sprays of silk-worked cherry-blossom.

"Kohana," said Akira eagerly, "you see I could not keep away from you for long. Ever since I saw you in my father's house I have loved you."

Kohana laughed merrily. "I do not think I like your love-making very much. Baishu was here last night, and Baishu said quite a number of charming things to me. Let me see, what did he say? Oh, yes! He said, 'Kohana'—and he made the word sound as if it were running water—'my heart was like a dark pool before I met you. Now it is like a lake made glad by the sun by day and by the shadow of the moon and stars when the night comes.' Was that not a pretty speech?"

"I do not care for it," said Akira moodily.

"Would you not like to hear what my other suitors said?"

"No," replied Akira.

"Now you're cross, Akira, just because you think I have as many lovers as Kimiko, or the Lady Kaguya herself! I see two ugly lines on your forehead. Shall I sing? Shall I dance? Shall I make tea for you?"

"No, Kohana."

"No, Kohana," replied the dancing-girl in an exact imitation of his tone. "What shall I do for your entertainment? Come, Akira, you are dull company to-night. I have been sitting here all the evening, ever so lonely, and now your visit makes me still more miserable. Be honourably pleased to let that strong mouth break into a smile. There, there, it

comes now ! Quite a nice smile, too. Thank you, Akira."

"You make it so hard for me to speak," said Akira with a tremor in his voice. "You are a sweet bright-winged butterfly for ever sipping the honey of the world's flowers—"

"Akira, how splendid ! Did you really get that out of your own head ?"

"There is just one flower in that big garden," went on Akira, "that keeps on looking out for you, keeps on wanting you. There is just one flower, Kohana, that would possess you always, that never wants you to go away to other flowers any more. Do you understand ?"

"Perhaps," said Kohana evasively. She took up a beautiful ornamented mirror, and from a lacquered box withdrew various toilet articles. She added a shade more colour to her lips, a touch of powder to her chin. Then she looked for a long time into the mirror.

"Akira," she said, rather wistfully, "the wings of your butterfly will not always be beautiful. They will become faded, torn, old—Oh yes, they will ! You do not know the vanity of that butterfly, my poor Akira. The honey of admiration must come from many flowers yet."

"And then ?" said Akira, leaning forward and looking eagerly into her face.

"Oh ! do not count on afterwards, my dear friend. When the butterfly can no longer fly from flower to

flower, it will just settle down on the dusty road and never wake up again."

"Is such a sad end worth while?"

"Yes, because the getting there is so splendid!"

"Kohana, I cannot live without you. I want you to become my wife. I will go on waiting for you to come to me."

"My poor Akira, I see you suffer. I like you better than others who have sought my hand. Please do not forget that I am a dancing-girl, and although many of us marry, I shall never do so. Let it be good-bye. I shall not change my mind."

Akira looked at her tenderly. "We are not always wise when we love," he said simply, "for love has flood-gates that, when once open, sweep reason aside. I cannot say good-bye, give up hope yet. I must come again and again."

"It will be a sword in your heart, Akira, this coming. Oh! go away and try to forget!"

Akira took the hand that peeped out of the grey and pink sleeve. He caressed it for a moment. Then suddenly he rubbed the fingers against his cheek and went out of the room without a word.

For many weeks Akira came to see Kohana. He found her, as he had always found her, sweet, coquettish, but firm in her resolve. There was a hint of deeper and truer things beneath the merry laughter and her apparently artless but well-studied

pleasantries. He wanted the woman, and she always gave him the geisha.

One night Kohana said to her lover: "Akira, if you love me, go away and bury your love in some lovers' cemetery by the sea. It is not only useless for you to continue your wooing, but it is becoming really painful to me. Your pale worn face, your eyes that have seen so many sleepless nights, come between me and the sunshine. You are making grey days for me, and how can a butterfly be happy when the sky is clouded and the wind of sorrow is cold? I fly in the Street of the Geisha. I shall always fly there, Akira, always."

There were tears in Kohana's eyes. Akira had never seen tears in her eyes before, and he was deeply moved. "Because you wish it," he said gently, "I shall go away and never return again. I shall bury the lonely dream which you cannot dream too, you who are called 'The Flower-Bud of Ten Thousand Dreams'. I go, Kohana, without a shade of bitterness in my heart. May the Gods be good to you always, and may you never know, as I know, what cruel sorrow means."

Once more Akira pressed back a silk sleeve and slowly caressed Kohana's arm. "Shut your eyes," he whispered. "It would never do for a joyous butterfly to look upon anything that is sad."

Kohana closed her eyes. When she opened them again she found that Akira had gone. "It is better

so," she said, looking into her mirror, "and yet—" tears filled her eyes again. The pretty reflection in the mirror became blurred. She flung the dainty disc aside and leant forward with her forehead pressed against her extended hands. The grey and pink sleeves rested on the matting. A butterfly was fluttering near the flower of sorrow, and finding in those red petals the flower of love.

In the meantime Akira walked slowly down the Street of the Geisha and entered the temple where Tozo lived.

"Well," said the old priest, looking closely at his friend, "have you come to call me a fool, to tell me that the Street of the Geisha is the best street in the world, the one place where love is and rare enchantment?"

"No," replied Akira wearily, "I have come to find the Way of Peace. Help me to find it, friend."

If Tozo could be sarcastic, he could also be gentle and sympathetic. He uttered never a word of reproach. "Do not fear," said he, "the wound in your heart will heal. By the most blessed teaching of the Lord Buddha you shall indeed find peace. Blot out for ever the Street of the Geisha and set aside all the snares and delusions of this world; thus shall you destroy the power of Karma and finally attain Nirvāṇa."

In due time Akira, having successfully passed through his novitiate, became a Buddhist priest,

and taking upon himself all the solemn vows of his calling, entered a temple at Kamakura. He was regarded as a zealous teacher, a faithful friend to the poor, and most especially was he gentle to all those whose sorrow was the sorrow of unrequited love.

Akira had found peace at last, and the Street of the Geisha became to him as a shadowy street in a half-remembered dream. He loved the towering figure of the Daibutsu, and whenever he passed that way he looked with joy and gratitude upon that serene face. To Akira it was not a gigantic image of bronze, but it seemed to him, especially in the early morning and in the twilight of evening, that the Lord Buddha himself was sitting there. Often he would prostrate himself before that figure and imagine that he was floating up into the Paradise of Incense, or down below the shining waves of the sea into the Paradise of Perfect Happiness. It was always when his spiritual joy was at its height that he prayed most ardently for a quiet, sure strength that would be proof against the most subtle temptations of the world.

Once, before the figure of Amida-Buddha, he saw a boy wantonly try to kill a bird. The creature's wing was bruised. He picked up the bird and held it gently in his hand. "Seek not to destroy life," said Akira to the boy, "for all life is sacred to the Lord Buddha." And Akira went away, nursed the bird for a day or two, and, when it had recovered, set it free

with no little joy in his heart. It sped on through a burnished sky of gold, settled on a *torii*, and began to sing.

One day in the spring, when Akira was sitting in the outer court of the temple, watching children play about him, he was surprised to see a woman advance toward him, her face hidden behind a thick veil.

"Akira!" said the woman softly.

"*Anata?*" ("Thou?") replied the priest. He recognised the voice of Kohana, and the sound of that voice had lost none of its sweetness.

"Why do you come?" said Akira presently.

"Because," replied Kohana, withdrawing the veil, "from the moment you left me I learnt that love had come into my heart. I tried to stifle it. I went on living in the Street of the Geisha, thinking that the diversions of my calling would in time check my passion. But my love grew greater every day until at last I obtained leave of absence and resolved to come and find you. Only when I reached Kamakura did I learn that you had become a priest. Perhaps, having made that discovery, I ought to have gone back, but I did not go back. I, a poor, tired butterfly, flutter at your heart in vain now."

"In vain now," murmured Akira. "O Kohana, you have come too late. I have given all to the Lord Buddha, and there is nothing left for you. Return, little one, not to the Street of the Geisha, but somewhere where you may lead a more useful life."

Kohana resented these words. She could not realise that the man who sat so calmly before her was a priest and no longer her lover. It was hard to believe that hands that had once caressed her were now pressed together like the hands of a sacred image.

"Akira," she said, "then you do not remember the old days?"

"'Tis as a dream," replied the priest, drawing in his breath quickly. "Be pleased to leave me."

"Not yet," said Kohana, "not yet. O how pitifully have we changed places! Must I beg one sweet human word from you? O Akira, tell me, is there no love in your heart for me now?"

"I cannot answer. Be pleased to go away."

"I must have your answer," persisted Kohana.

"You shall have my answer," said Akira in a strange, plaintive voice. "To-night you shall have it. Do you remember that when my love gave you pain and not joy I went away and promised never to return?"

"Yes, I remember. I drove you away."

"No, you did not drive me away. It was enough that you wanted me to go. Kohana, if you love me as I loved you then, be pleased not to come back for my answer."

Kohana looked steadily at the priest. Because she was hungry for love and because it was not like the love of Akira, she said: "I do not know what you mean. I shall come back to-night for your answer."

"You will know then," replied Akira firmly, "you will know then," and such an expression of agony and appeal came into his face as he uttered these words that Kohana withdrew. "He is thinking," she said softly, "how my heart will ache when he tells me that he loves me not. Oh, he's a good, cold man!"

Shortly before midnight Kohana came again to the temple. She found Akira sitting in the moonlit courtyard with a strange smile on his face.

"Veil yourself," he said in a tense whisper. "We will make a short journey together. Come, give me your hand."

"Your hand is trembling," said Kohana, as they walked rapidly away from the temple.

The priest did not reply. He looked wistfully up at the Daibutsu in passing and noticed once again the serene smile on that face. When Akira whispered, "Forgive," too softly for Kohana to hear him, it seemed that the smile grew more tender, more full of boundless mercy. They left Amida-Buddha sitting in the moonlight, the moonlight that shone upon the dusty road and on the clouds of cherry-blossom.

When they reached a small *torii*, near Enoshima, Akira told Kohana that here she should have his answer. "Go," he said, "and sit down by that pine tree. Still veil your face, and I beg that you will also close your eyes."

When Kohana had obeyed, Akira collected a number of stones and made a small tower of them

under the *torii*. Then he threw a rope over one of the cross-beams of the gateway, made a noose at the other end and slipped it round his neck. For a moment he stood with the rope fairly taut. Then, looking toward Kohana, he kicked away some of the stones. A wind, full of the petals of cherry-blossom, suddenly sprang up, and swayed the body of the dead priest to and fro while the sea made music on the shore.

"May I look now?" said Kohana. "Please speak to me. I do not understand all these mysteries. Akira?"

There was no reply except the song of the sea and the rush of the wind playing with countless pink and white petals.

For five minutes Kohana waited with a beating heart. Then she withdrew the veil and opened her eyes. She rushed forward with a cry of horror and sank beneath the swaying figure.

"Your answer," she cried, "your answer! I did not think it would be like that, but I understand!"

Kohana, unable to remove the body, hastened back to Kamakura, and when she had made known the dreadful news, she prostrated herself before the Daibutsu. "O Lord Buddha," she cried, with a ring of triumph in her voice, "Akira is mine and not yours now! He shall be mine for many existences, mine for ever!"

But when Kohana looked into the face of Amida-Buddha, she saw that on his breast rested the shining soul of Akira.

THE PASSING OF RIKIU

THE STORY OF A JAPANESE TEA MASTER

I

RIKIU, the famous Japanese Tea Master, sat in his garden. There was a smile of infinite peace upon his face as he gazed at the bent form of a pine tree against the evening sky, noted the homeward flight of heron, and the bell-like song of an invisible cricket.

A shadow fell across a silver-sanded pathway, the shadow of a fair woman. When the Tea Master noticed it, he said to himself: "In the drinking of tea I find the Paradise of Wondrous Incense; but in the coming of a pretty woman even the Gods forget their divinity. Out of the flowers and butterflies and summer breezes is a woman made, and she lives her short day in the sun of human love."

O-Kon ("Deep Blue"), with a radiant smile, sat beside the Tea Master. "Still dreaming?" she said, stretching forth her hand and caressing one of Rikiu's dark grey sleeves. "If I were to take a bamboo tube and blow you up very, very big, no one would be able to distinguish you from the Daibutsu at Kamakura!

When I told Hideyoshi that, his ugly monkey-face wrinkled up, and he said : ‘ Funny ! Funny ! First of all I love my soldiers, then my favourite women, and then Prince Holy Tea ’—meaning you.”

O-Kon laughed ; but there was something hard and bitter in her laughter as she looked into the Tea Master’s solemn face.

“ You are on intimate terms with the Regent Hideyoshi ? ” inquired Rikiu.

“ His terms are always intimate. But what is that to me ? Though he be robed in splendour he still reeks of the stable. A thousand times a day he calls himself ‘ Sun of the World,’ and when I hear him, I say to myself : ‘ Oh, Monkey-face ! Oh, Monkey-face, where is your equal for vanity ? ’ ”

“ There is a fear in my heart to-night,” said Rikiu, taking the woman’s hand and lightly touching the fingers as if they were the white petals of a lotus. “ I know Hideyoshi’s good qualities, and they are many, but I also know his weaknesses. You must never gratify that mad lust of his that burns all that is best in a woman, and leaves behind a heap of ashes best buried with the tears of pity. The colour of youth is splendid, but the end of snow is Nirvāṇa.”

“ I may be driven to the folly of which you speak,” said O-Kon gently. “ Are you so absorbed in your dream that you cannot read my heart ? When in the night my shadow falls upon the *shoji* (paper slides), I say : ‘ Oh, lonely, lonely shadow ! My heart

cries for two shadows upon the *shoji*—yours and mine ! ’ ’

The Tea Master was silent for a moment. Then he said, in a voice that faltered : “ O-Kon, you have pulled back the curtain of your heart to-night. I wish I had never seen how human it is, how clearly my own unworthy self lies marked upon it. There is no peace in your heart, O-Kon, but unrest, sorrow, yearning that is never satisfied.”

“ Never satisfied ? ” murmured O-Kon, with something defiant in her face that was made ghostly pale in the moonlight.

“ Never satisfied,” said Rikiu, with a half-stifled sob. “ O-Kon, my poor O-Kon, cannot you find, as I have found, eternal peace in the liquid jade of the tea-plant ? Cannot you find—— ? ”

“ You mock me ! ” hissed O-Kon, striking the ground with her small hand. “ I curse the liquid jade that takes you beyond my reach, and the frigid tea ceremonies that have turned your heart into an ice-cold stone. Above all I curse that fool Daruma whose severed eyelids were transformed into the tea-plant—my love for you has turned into hate. There will still be one shadow on the *shoji*, but, Prince Holy Tea, it will not be quite the same shadow—oh, it will be different, different ! ”

Rikiu looked upon the retreating figure of O-Kon with compassionate eyes. When she had disappeared, he murmured : “ You have wronged the tea that

has been to me the amber gate leading to everlasting beauty, and most of all you have wronged the music of your own fair soul. Though you slumber to-night with hate and vengeance in your heart, in the morning, when you wake, by the mercy and infinite goodness of the Lord Buddha, you shall find peace."

II

When O-Kon awoke the next morning her hatred had not disappeared. It had grown more intense, and was now a deep, surging flood--the flood of vengeance that desired to tear down the man who had seen her love and yielded none in return. She put on her most beautiful kimono, the kimono with silk cherry-blossom. She painted her lips, and was at length satisfied with the elaborate arrangement of her glossy black hair. She bent over a mirror and carefully examined every detail of her face. "Well, silver mirror," she said with a smile, "shall I please Lord Monkey-face to-day?" The reflection of scarlet mouth, laughing eyes, and night-black hair seemed to whisper back: "You will, O-Kon, you will!" "Ah! little mirror, I wish you would always look back at me like that." Then O-Kon laid the metal disc aside, passed out into the street, and entered a palanquin. "To Hideyoshi's palace," she said sweetly to the bearers.

O-Kon had a frown on her forehead as she leant back in the palanquin. She was never quite

sure of Hideyoshi. He was a man of moods, gay to-day, gloomy to-morrow, liberal and meagre with his favours by turn. Could she twist him round her finger, or could he, with that brutal vanity of his, draw her down to his own level without attaining her end? She did not know. Much depended on his last night's slumber, and much, too, on the flatteries that immediately preceded her visit.

When the palanquin was lowered and O-Kon entered the palace, the frown had disappeared. Officials bowed before her, and the guards smiled when she had passed them. All knew O-Kon, and all knew that Hideyoshi loved her. After the sending of messages and a period of waiting that seemed interminable, O-Kon was favoured with a private audience with the Regent.

"Great Sun of the World!" cried O-Kon, as she prostrated herself before Hideyoshi—only the backs of her little hands were aware of the concealed smile—"Great Sun of the World, whose glory transcends the glory of the Celestial Kingdom, be honourably pleased, in all thy pomp, to hear my humble supplications."

More followed in a similar vein, and when O-Kon had repeated, parrot-fashion, all the Court jargon she could remember, Hideyoshi, with a leering, self-satisfied smile, bade her rise, delighted that this woman of all women should seek a private audience with him.

"Well, little one," said the Regent, "Sun of the World and Moon of the Night are together at last. What brings you here?"

"I have come to speak of Rikiu."

"Oh, Prince Holy Tea!" Hideyoshi yawned. "I have grown weary of him of late. Well?"

"My lord, your weariness is part of your superb intelligence, but Rikiu's weariness of you shows his bad taste and impudence."

"So the slave tires of my exalted patronage? We allow licence to dreamers, but they must not go too far with their follies. The hand that gives can also take away, and the hand of Hideyoshi can strike with the force of the Thunder God."

"My lord, your words of wisdom overwhelm me. I pray you bear with your servant yet a little longer. This Rikiu, once your friend, is now your enemy. He has mocked you. He has called you Monkey-face, stable-upstart—you who are the Sun of the World! He seeks to put an end to your incomparable life. He seeks to poison you—in a cup of tea."

The small eyes of Hideyoshi shone with anger. There were ugly blue patches on his face, and his hands twitched violently. "Enough, O-Kon!" he shouted. "This man who has made an idol of his tea shall find a dagger in the dregs. On a certain day he shall commit *hara-kiri*. I shall be well rid of such a treacherous fellow."

These words filled O-Kon with joy. She was about to ask permission to leave his presence, when she noticed a change in Hideyoshi's face.

"O-Kon," said the Regent, bending forward and lightly tapping his fan on the floor. "O-Kon, I have a mind to spare Rikiu's life this time." He paused a moment and read all too clearly the meaning of a tremor that shook the silk cherry-blossom, the meaning of the pretty teeth that gripped the bright-painted lips with vexation. "O-Kon," continued the Regent, "it rests with you whether I command the Tea Master to take his life or not."

"With me?" said O-Kon, with a terrible understanding.

"Yes," replied Hideyoshi, "with you. I give the word for Rikiu's death in exchange for your love. If you do not agree to this, then the Tea Master lives, but in future we will see that he confines his attention exclusively to the amber beverage. Well, O-Kon, which is it to be?"

"From the hour of Rikiu's death, my lord, I come to you!"

III

A few days later Rikiu received a formal letter from Hideyoshi commanding that the Tea Master should take his life on a certain day. Rikiu read the missive as he sat in his garden. Never for a moment did the Tea Master imagine that O-Kon had

lied before his old friend the Regent, and that it was through her that he was compelled to commit *hara-kiri*. "I have enemies at the Court," he said, "and they have plotted against me." His voice was steady. There was no trace of fear or regret upon his face. "I shall die," he went on, "even as I have lived. I shall pass into the Land of Eternal Spring, where I shall no longer need the spiritualising effect of tea or the music of haunting bells. When the Gods call, I shall be ready. When they beckon, I shall come."

The Tea Master went about his duties as usual. His servants had always good cause to remember his kindness of heart; but since he had received the order to end his life, they were still more impressed by his nobility of character. It was they, and not the Master, who wept. In the few days at his disposal he set his house in order. He studied the Buddhist scriptures, played upon the *biwa*, and always spoke cheerfully to those about him. One night, when no one was looking, he bade farewell to his beloved garden. All he said was: "Cannot I make you small and take you with me?" His step was firm, and there were no tears in the eyes of one who had learnt the mystery of perpetual joy. One of the last duties he performed was to send out invitations to his disciples asking them to attend his final tea ceremony.

On the day appointed for Rikiu's death the guests assembled in the portico of his house. They gazed

with sad eyes into the garden, where all the leaves seemed whispering together, ghosts talking of the departure of their beloved Master. Presently one of the disciples said : " Those who live beautifully know how to die beautifully too." When these words had been spoken, sweet incense drifted out from the tea-room. It was a silent message bidding the disciples enter the calm and fragrant apartment.

One by one the disciples took their places. In the *tokonoma* (alcove) hung a *kakemono*, and looking sorrowfully upon it they read of the passing of all earthly things, written by an old monk whose human remains had long rested in a cemetery by the sea. The kettle boiled on the brazier. Once that boiling kettle had reminded them of a sunny, laughing stream, of pine trees singing together, of the merry patter of children's feet. Now the song was different. It was like the cry of a cicada calling in vain to its absent mate.

At length the Tea Master entered the apartment, calm and dignified, and served each guest with the precious beverage of the liquid jade. When he had done so, he drank from his own cup in perfect silence, and then allowed the disciples to admire all the utensils connected with the tea-equipage. Later, Rikiu presented each guest with a small gift, and taking his bowl in his hand, he exclaimed : " Never again shall this cup, polluted by the lips of misfortune, be used by man." And with these words he broke the vessel.

The ceremony was over. One by one the guests bade their dear Master a last farewell. When Rikiu was alone he took off his tea-gown and revealed beneath the white robe of Death. Then, taking his dagger, he said in a clear, steady voice :

“ Welcome to thee
O sword of eternity !
Through Buddha
And through Daruma alike
Thou hast cleft thy way.”

The Tea Master, with “ *Namu Amida Butsu !* ” (“ Hail, Omnipotent Buddha ! ”) upon his lips, passed down the road of earth into the peace of the far beyond.

For a moment there was silence in the room. The flower in the vase swayed in the breeze and the sweet incense still lingered in the apartment. Then there came a soft rustling sound, like the movement of silken garments. A curtain was slowly, cautiously pushed aside, and O-Kon entered. Her face was pale, and there was no paint on the quivering lips. She knelt by the side of the Tea Master and lifted his head gently upon her lap. Tears fell on the lifeless face of Rikiu. “ Ah, thou very beautiful,” she said softly, “ forgive, forgive ! I shall not go back to Hideyoshi. I shall not go back. Oh, thou very beautiful, I am coming ! Let there be two shadows in Eternity.”

THE PINE TREE LOVERS

KINOME came clattering along the village street, holding a kite in her arms. Her red lips were pressed together, and it was evident that that pretty maid had seen something so wonderful that she longed to tell some one all about it.

There was always one old man to whom she could go. His name was Raku. She loved him for many reasons. He gave her sweet cakes, told her charming stories, and, moreover, pulled extremely funny faces.

Kinome found Raku sitting in his garden, looking at the sea through a white cloud of cherry-blossom. It seemed that the cherry-blossoms nodded with approval as the bees murmured their last evening song. Kinome heard the waves scamper over the golden sand, and heard the stones laugh softly together as they danced to the touch of white, cool fingers.

Kinome stood and watched Raku for some time. Then she said : " Honourable Raku, may I come in and see you ? "

Raku rose and gave a profound bow as he rubbed his hands over his knees in salutation.

" I was just wondering when you were coming to see me," said the old man. " Why, Kinome, what

have you got tucked away in that pretty head of yours? You look all puzzles and smiles this evening. Please come in and keep me company."

So the child went into the garden and sat down by the old man's side. She placed her precious kite on his knee, and laughed softly to herself.

"Yes," said Kinome, caressing the old man's hand with both her own, "I *have* got something to tell you—something very, very strange indeed. Do you know that old pine tree on the bank of Takasago, just a little way from here?"

"Indeed I do!" replied Raku. "That is called the 'Pine of Lovers'."

"I walked by it just now, dear old wrinkled man, and I heard voices calling to each other ever so softly. Then the moon came out from behind a cloud, and I saw two silver shadows—a man and a woman. They were bending down and raking the pine needles together, and all the time they spoke such kind and loving words that I could not feel frightened."

"Ah!" exclaimed Raku. "Little one, you have seen something that makes the world beautiful after all. You have seen what real love is. You won't understand what that means yet, but I hope you will some day. There is an old story about the Pine of Lovers; but it is getting late, and time Kinome was in bed. Why, dear me, there's the temple bell sounding, and you're not asleep!"

"You're teasing me, Raku. Oh, please tell me about the Pine Lovers!"

"Once upon a time," began the old man mysteriously, "only two people lived in this village, a fisherman and his wife. Even in those far-away days the sea was blue, and you could hear what the waves were singing about by holding a pink-white shell to your ear, just as you can to-day. These good fisherfolk were a happy couple, and although they were hard-working people they were wise enough to go out and see the flowers in bloom. When they felt the joy of it all in their hearts, they used to write about it.

"One day the fisherman and his wife were blessed with a daughter, whom they called O-Matsu. Now O-Matsu had no playmates and no toys such as you have, but in spite of this she was extremely happy. O-Matsu was beautiful, though, of course, not so beautiful as Kinome! Her eyes were as clear as the pools of the Inland Sea, her face, so full of happy, quaint dreams, was like the sun shining on Lake Biwa, and when she sang it seemed as if a nightingale lived in her throat.

"There was nothing O-Matsu loved to do more than to sit under the big pine tree on the bank of Takasago—the pine tree you saw this evening, Kinome. She would look at the red bark, and think it was red because it had fought and conquered other trees. But most of all she loved the

pine needles so thickly strewn about her. These she would weave into beautiful green-brown pictures. Her fingers were ever so clever, and once she made a lovely dress and sash entirely from pine needles. When she had made them, she solemnly said: 'I will not wear these pine clothes until my wedding-day.' You see, Kinome, she had been so happy in weaving these pine needles together that she wanted to keep what she had made for the happiest day of all, the day when a good and brave husband should shield her and love her always."

"How nice!" put in Kinome. "Didn't the pine-needles prick her a little? And oh! dear old wrinkled man, *did* she wear the pine clothes on her wedding day?"

"I am coming to that," said Raku, smiling. "Old men tell stories slowly, and you must not be too impatient. Well, one day a youth named Teoyo stood on an island—you can see it through these trees—watching the flight of a heron. Up, up it went into the blue sky, and Teoyo saw it fly over the village where the fisherfolk and their daughter lived.

"Now Teoyo was a youth who dearly loved adventure, and he thought it would be delightful to swim across the sea and discover the land over which the heron had flown. So one morning he dived into the sea and swam, and swam, and swam till the poor fellow found the waves spinning and dancing, and saw the sky bend down and try to

touch him. Then he lay unconscious on the water. But the waves were kind to him after all. Their blue-white fingers gently pressed him on and on till he was washed up at the place where O-Matsu sat spinning."

"Oh!" exclaimed Kinome, laughing and clapping her hands.

"What a surprise for O-Matsu," continued the old man, "to see this unconscious but handsome youth at her feet! She felt sorry for him, and dragged him to the pine tree, where she had already made a couch of sweet smelling pine needles.

"Presently Teoyo awoke, and gazed with delight at the pretty figure he saw before him. He thanked her warmly for all she had done for him, and deep down in his heart he thanked the heron, too, for leading him to such good fortune.

"Teoyo did not go back to his own island again, for after a few happy months had gone by, he married O-Matsu, and on her wedding morn she wore her dress and sash of pine needles."

"Thank you," said Kinome, stretching out her arms for the kite.

"That is not quite the end of the story, Kinome. When O-Matsu's parents died, her loss only seemed to make her love Teoyo the more. The older they grew the more they loved each other. Every night, when the moon shone, they went hand-in-hand to the pine tree, and with their rakes they made a

couch for the morrow. As they collected the pine needles together they repeated their love-vows, sometimes singing, in voices broken down with age, tender love-songs it is good to hear old people sing.

“One night the silver face of the moon peered through the branches of the pine tree, and looked in vain for the old lovers sitting together on a couch of pine needles. Their rakes lay side by side. Still the moon waited for the slow and stumbling steps of the Pine Tree Lovers. But that night they did not come. Kinome, they had gone home to an everlasting resting-place on the River of Souls. There was nothing sad in their going away. They had loved so well and so splendidly, in old age as well as in youth, that the Gods allowed their souls to come back again and wander round the pine tree that had listened to their love for so many years. When the moon is full they whisper and laugh and sing and draw the pine needles together, while the sea sings softly over the shells.”

CHINESE

THE PEONY OF PAO-YU

I

SAN-LANG was slowly walking home, reading a book with so much diligence that he not infrequently collided with a sedan-chair or with a pedestrian in the street. On such occasions, without the least discomposure, he would smile apologies, blink a moment at the sun, and then continue his study.

Suddenly San-Lang came to a standstill, dropped the book into a capacious sleeve, and listened astonished, as he was greeted with a merry peal of laughter. He was still more amazed when a soft ball, covered with silk, struck him gently on the cheek.

Now San-Lang, though a scholar of considerable repute, knew well what that ball signified. He was aware that it had been thrown by a lady who regarded some one with favour, and not only with favour, but with a touch of romance as well.

San-Lang picked up the ball, admiring the design that had been worked upon it. As he did so, he shook his head gravely. "There must be some mistake," he said solemnly. "If I thought for a moment

that this ball was intended for me, I should have the painful and undignified necessity of taking to my heels ! ”

The merry laughter sounded again, and when the scholar had looked at a white cloud, at the mountains, and into one of his big sleeves, he chanced to see a young lady standing in a garden, radiant and sweet-scented with many peonies.

“ Must I do all the laughing,” she said coyly, “ while you do nothing but shake your head and talk of mistakes ? ”

San-Lang gave a profound bow, partly because courtesy required it, and partly because an obeisance served to conceal his confusion. “ I still think the little ball was not intended for me,” he said simply, “ and yet I am honoured by the mistake.”

“ But, Sir Wisdom, since you will drag a confession from me, the ball was intended for you. I have practised throwing it in the garden, and ah me !—how often I failed to hit the big nodding faces of the peonies. Your face is somewhat larger than a peony-bloom, and so I had the good fortune to hit it ! Now, Sir, am I to have the pleasure of seeing a scholar run down a dusty street on a hot afternoon ? ”

San-Lang smiled. “ Even now,” he said, “ though I have for long treasured the wisdom of the ancients, I do not quite understand.”

“ Do you think,” replied the girl, “ that all your learning can compare with the meaning of that little

ball? Go your way, good Sir, but have a care lest walking and reading in a busy street should lead to calamity. Oh, I have watched you for many a summer day pass this garden with your nose glued to a book, murmuring learned annotations and flicking away a butterfly as if it were a devil! Mark my words, timid scholar, a time will come when a maid will warm your heart as a bird warms an egg in its nest. San-Lang is your name, and I am called Pao-Yu ("Precious Jade"). Now get you home, and write a treatise on the impudence of women who throw balls and who are foolishly, almost hopelessly, romantic!"

San-Lang, being at a loss to know what to say, gave another profound bow, and took his departure. He still walked leisurely, but made no attempt to read. He held the silk ball tightly in his hand, peeping at it now and again as if he were looking at a treasure not meet for the gaze of other people.

When he got home he prepared tea. He sipped the amber-coloured beverage dreamily as he looked out into the garden, and watched a flock of herons flying high over a company of gnarled pine trees till the birds were lost in the deep violet of the sky. San-Lang was aware that he, too, had peonies in his garden, and he thought that their perfume was the most exquisite perfume in the world. He became suddenly alive to the beauty of his surroundings, and for the first time in his life he allowed his

imagination free play. He was not really drinking a particularly choice tea, and yet in that magical hour he thought it had come from the Hills of Emitted Spring and the Valley of Drooping Fragrance. When, later on, almost ecstatic in his reverie, San-Lang partook of wine, he called it "Ten Thousand Beauties in One Cup".

A youth came into the room and coughed discreetly.

"Well?" said Sang-Lang, without looking up.

"I have come for my lesson, master."

"There will be no lesson this evening," replied San-Lang gravely.

"But, master, the examination——"

"There will be no lesson this evening," repeated San-Lang. "Please do not speak, but kindly remove your presence as speedily as possible."

The puzzled youth hastily retreated, and San-Lang went on dreaming.

Presently the moonlight crept into the garden and silvered the once red peonies.

"I see her," murmured San-Lang, "as she stood in the garden. She wore a tight-sleeved jacket, bright as the dawn, and covered with butterflies and flowers embroidered in gold. Then there was her silk pelisse, lined with slate-blue ermine, while her lower garments were as the colour of a kingfisher. Her eyebrows curved upwards like willow-leaves. Her slender waist resembled dancing snow wafted by a gust of wind."

San-Lang, having uttered this eulogy, took out the silk ball and gazed at it for a long time. Then he rose to his feet and said : " San-Lang, you have been love's fool for a night. To-morrow you will be honourably pleased to forget your foolishness. Even now you will have the goodness to bid farewell to Pao-Yu, and, when the sun rises, see that your well-shaped nose is in close proximity to a learned and salutary book."

II

When San-Lang awoke the next morning he set about his business with renewed zest. He went to the youth who had missed his lesson the previous night, and the scholar's lengthy discourse was a strange mingling of suavity, erudition, wit, and temper. For the time being San-Lang had set his love aside, and, with a fierceness that surprised his pupil, he quoted the following from one of the Odes of Confucius : " A clever man builds a city. A clever woman lays one low. With all her qualifications, that clever woman is but an ill-omened bird." There was no gainsaying San-Lang, much less Confucius, so the youth went away, assured that the ancients and their exponents must have been unfortunate in their love-affairs.

Though San-Lang worked diligently, there were times when the little silk ball whispered romantic messages to him, when the dainty figure of Pao-Yu

seemed to beckon with almost irresistible abandon. He sedulously avoided passing by her garden. He prayed, he wrote, he studied, he recited long passages of dry-as-dust wisdom, but for all the battlements he set about him, he felt that they were pulled down over and over again by the white hands of "Precious Jade". Her hands, her smile, her laughter, made for his defeat.

At length San-Lang, having grown thin and absent-minded in his vain attempt to still the voice of love, decided to take up his abode in a mountain temple. Flight not only seemed inevitable, but his only chance of escaping from the persistent call of Pao-Yu.

A month later San-Lang climbed a certain mountain, followed by perspiring attendants carrying a library of books.

Kuo, the priest of the White Deer Temple, greeted San-Lang with approval. Kuo served the Gods only that he might the better serve himself. He could pull a long face over the sorrow of others, but its length and awful solemnity entirely depended upon the fees that fell into his claw-like hand.

"You wish to stay here?" inquired Kuo.

"Yes," replied San-Lang, eyeing the priest sharply. "It is a filthy temple, where the Gods are sadly in need of fresh garments, but 'twill serve."

"Ay, 'twill serve," murmured the priest. "The air is pure, the view incomparable, and, for a scholar

of the fame of San-Lang, the peace of these surroundings is all that could be desired."

"You have a voluble tongue, Kuo, and if I mistake not, you are a thoroughgoing humbug. I see that you do not rely on the efficacy of one God, but have a collection of them under this roof."

"The Gods are so perverse," whined Kuo. "To-day Buddha is asleep and Kwanjin benevolent. To-morrow the Goddess of Mercy snores while the Blessed One smiles, and so, my dear Sir, one must pander to their weaknesses, or my troubled and most credulous pilgrims would suffer in consequence."

"I come here to study and to forget the ways of the world," said San-Lang.

"So?" replied Kuo. "I have a fancy that you would fain make your books a heavy tombstone to bury a maid. In other words, it is evident that you have fallen in love, and have climbed to the top of this mountain in order to jump out of it. Now there is nothing so efficacious for the sorrows of this world as the precious gift of the poppy. It brings a dream three parts hell and one part heaven, but it is such a delectable heaven that I willingly go through all horror to attain it."

"That is not my way," said San-Lang coolly. "That is the way of vice-goaded fools."

"As you please," murmured the priest. "For myself, I know not love. Give me the fruit of poppies and I am well content. As for woman, she pays the

Gods well. She is always wanting something, and never knows precisely what. The Gods love her pretty indecision."

Kuo, resembling a skeleton in a dirty robe, drew closer. His mouth expanded into a sly smile, as if a dry seed-pod had been suddenly split open by the warm sunshine. "A little money in advance," he whispered, thrusting out his hand. "Alas, that so few *cash* should be associated with good works! On the day of the full moon and on the day of the new moon I do excellent business, but I needs must live on more than two days in a month."

San-Lang gave the priest money. "Go," said he, "rest your tongue that has been oiled too freely with foolishness, and in future let it wag less frequently in my company."

Kuo shuffled away with an obsequious bow and joined his attendant in another room.

San-Lang went to the shrine of Kwanjin and prostrated himself. In the mellow light he saw her faded garments. He saw, too, the beauty of her face gleaming through the dust of ages, and the infinite charity of her many extended arms. She who had loved gave love's forgetfulness and love's peace. While she bestowed her ineffable balm, Kuo and his assistant sat in the outer court. They were not looking at the rice-fields in the valley, nor at the far-away blue sea studded with jewels, nor at the mountains that rose peak above peak before them. They were

dreaming the dream of poppies, the dream that is three parts hell and one part heaven.

One day, while San-Lang was studying in a grotto, he observed a hunting party in the distance, but not so far away as to prevent him from seeing that Pao-Yu was of that swift-moving company. Suddenly he saw the girl's mount stumble, regain its footing for a moment, and then charge into a boulder and roll over with its fair rider crushed beneath. A sharp cry from the rest of the party rang through the air, as one by one they raced to the scene of the catastrophe. Presently Pao-Yu's limp little body was carried gently away.

"There's been an accident," said Kuo, creeping to the mouth of the grotto and pulling only a moderately long face. "A young lady has been killed. She has, in giving chase to an animal, opposed the teaching of the Lord Buddha, but it is a pity that a beautiful woman should die for such a trifling sin."

San-Lang did not speak.

"There's been an accident," repeated Kuo, this time with a smile.

Still San-Lang remained silent.

"As you will," continued the priest suavely. Then Kuo, puzzled by San-Lang's manner, left the cave.

Now it happened, much to Kuo's delight, that arrangements were made to bury Pao-Yu in the White Deer Temple.

San-Lang, with a full heart, watched the funeral procession slowly winding up the mountain path. He saw the red pall on Pao-Yu's coffin, red like the peonies that had bloomed in her garden in the summer time.

Kuo, during the ceremony, adjusted his face to its final degree of assumed sorrow. Now his voice roared so that the deafest Gods might hear him, and now it whined with mock gentleness and with much assumption of holiness.

When the wailing, white-robed procession had gone away, Kuo and his assistant were about to carry the earthly remains of Pao-Yu to a little cave, when San-Lang came forward.

"Place not your crow-hands there!" he hissed fiercely.

Kuo stared stupidly. "I am the priest of this temple. I must perform my duties, and all the more readily seeing that I have been well paid for my services."

"Get you gone, you gibbering poppy-heads! Here's money for you. Go!"

When San-Lang was alone he stooped down, raised the coffin gently, and carried it to a small cave. Love had come to his heart again, and tears fell upon the pall that was red like peonies.

Every day, and many times a day, San-Lang went to the cave to pray for Pao-Yu, and his prayers were a long and tender confession of his love. One night the spirit of Pao-Yu stood beside San-Lang.

"My dear lover," she sobbed pitifully, "I am not happy. Yam-Lo, the Lord of the Land of Shadows where I dwell, is angry with me because in my earthly existence I loved the chase. San-Lang, the big-hearted, the wise, the true, pray to Kwanjin that my sorrow may be lightened, and that I may find favour with the now wrathful Yam-Lo."

With a sweet smile the soul of Pao-Yu suddenly vanished, and San-Lang went to Kwanjin's shrine and there implored that the Goddess of Mercy would soften the heart of Yam-Lo toward Precious Jade.

Many nights later Pao-Yu again came to her lover. "Oh, San-Lang," she said, "Kwanjin has answered your supplications, and Yam-Lo has shown mercy toward me. I am about to be reborn into the world. Write down the street and the house and the town where I shall live, and write, too, the name of my future parents. Oh, modest and shy San-Lang, you have taken me to your heart at last! Come to me when I am eighteen years old . . . and . . . never go away again!"

San-Lang eagerly wrote down the particulars Pao-Yu gave him. Then he said gently: "Dear love of mine, how shall I recognise you?"

"My future parents will still call me Pao-Yu. Listen. On that summer day of your coming I shall wear a red peony-bud in my hair, and you will bring the little silk ball."

"You will love me then, Pao-Yu?" faltered San-Lang. "Do not forget that I shall be nearly fifty years old when I meet you again, while you will be but a maid. Have you thought of that?"

"I have thought of that," replied Pao-Yu. "You will never seem old to me . . . Yam-Lo calls. Farewell."

III

Nearly eighteen years passed by, and San-Lang set out on a long journey. He had only one sorrow on that bright day—the consciousness of his advancing age. His back was bent, he had lost his good looks, and his step faltered a little; but the same love burned in his heart. He never for a moment doubted that he would meet Pao-Yu again, and so he pressed forward and travelled from town to town, footsore and weary, but full of hope.

One night Kwanjin came to San-Lang and said: "Oh, faithful of heart, whose prayers are sweeter than pear-blossom, know that my arms stretch to the far confines of the world, full of succour and mercy! Of a truth, youth should mate with youth and not with old age. I will renew your youth. Go bathe in yonder pool, and its waters shall be like the celestial Fountain of Youth."

When San-Lang had offered up his thanks, he hastened to bathe in the pool, and lo! even as Kwanjin had said, he became young again.

At last San-Lang came to the house where Pao-Yu lived. An angry servant greeted him.

"Go away," said the servant fiercely. "The Lady Pao-Yu is ill. She is in a decline, and frets over her future marriage with a rich man of this town."

San-Lang winced. "Say," said he, "that the scholar San-Lang waits without and seeks an audience."

"We know your name," replied the servant drily, "and my master has given me orders on no account to admit you. My master, Sir, is not to be trifled with."

"Neither am I," said San-Lang. "Go, tell your master or mistress that one would fain see the Lady Pao-Yu—one who alone can make her well again."

The servant, grumbling profusely, retired, and appeared a few minutes later. "You may enter," he said, with a smile, pocketing the coins that were handed to him.

"My daughter," said the mistress of the house, addressing San-Lang, "is on the point of death. She has opposed our wishes for her marriage, and has repeatedly told us that she has given her heart to one called San-Lang, and that he would come to claim her love. You are called San-Lang, but the San-Lang of her story was old and not young."

"Do you value your daughter's life and happiness?" said San-Lang.

"With all my heart, and yet. . ."

"I am the San-Lang Pao-Yu waits for ! Give me leave to see her and you will find that what I say is true, and you will also discover that the love I bring will be a medicine for her dear heart which no physician could concoct."

The mistress of the house faltered. "Hark ! " she exclaimed. "Pao-Yu calls. Your name is on her lips. Follow me."

San-Lang entered a darkened room and saw Pao-Yu.

"Peace, mother, peace !" she said softly. "He comes ! He comes ! Over the mountains, in and out the valleys, along the highways and byways he has journeyed ever toward me. I knew he would come. . . . San-Lang, how is it that you are like you were eighteen years ago ? "

San-Lang explained.

Pao-Yu sat up. Her merry laughter rang through the room. "The silk ball," she said ; " have you brought it with you ? "

Her lover nodded.

"Give it to me."

The scholar handed her the ball with a smile. She held it a moment, and then gently threw it at San-Lang's cheek, while the red peony-bud quivered in her dark hair.

FLOWER OF THE SNOW

I

KOUAN-YU slowly walked down the street of a Chinese city, his thin beard and big sleeves blowing in the breeze. He looked the personification of wisdom, benignity and solemnity as his eyes gazed dreamily through his spectacles. Carrying a small bamboo stand under one arm and a number of books under the other, he might have been mistaken by a stranger for the God of Learning. People spoke to him, smiled, nodded, and the old man acknowledged their salutations with rather absent-minded courtesy.

Reaching a certain sun-baked wall, Kouan-yu set down the bamboo stand and placed the books upon it, as if they had been rare and delicate flowers it was necessary to arrange with extreme gentleness. When he had produced his writing materials, he gave himself up to the joy of meditation.

Those who did not know Kouan-Yu would never have imagined that he was there in that busy street for the purpose of earning his living. For many years he had been a professional letter-writer. In that capacity he had learned much of human character, and certainly all that was to be known of

inditing an epistle. He would write a letter for a mother to her wayward son, for a man to his bitterest enemy, for a girl to her lover, with equal felicity. No matter how persuasive or bitter or flowery his language, no matter how many choice extracts from the ancients he included in his clever epistles, he never charged more than a halfpenny for his labour. In sharp contrast with the sweet-seller by his side or the quack doctor opposite, Kouan-yu never solicited custom. He remained at his post all day long, impervious, it seemed, to either joy or sorrow—a patient, pathetic figure who cared not whether the sky was blue or overcast, whether he made many halfpence or not.

As the old man leaned over his stand, Ko-ngai, a pretty young woman whom he had known as a child, came up to him.

“Kouan-yu,” she said, with a degree of familiarity that appeared appalling, “how beautifully ugly you are! Do please wake up and see the blue sky and the sunshine. Don’t you know that it’s a glorious spring day and that it’s good to be alive?”

“Spring?” murmured the old man in a voice that was particularly melodious. “Ah, to be sure—spring! So many people want letters written for them in the spring—and they are nearly all love-letters.”

“Of course! Why not? Isn’t it better to fall in love when the trees are in bud than when they are covered with snow?”

“You are romantic, Ko-ngai! The blossom of spring has got into your veins and your heart’s in flower. The trouble with spring is that it doesn’t last; and love is much like spring, Ko-ngai. That doctor yonder is selling love-philtres because he’s either a fool or a knave. I give away an antidote for love that is neither a liquid nor a powder, but wisdom more precious than pearls, more lovely than the palaces of infatuated emperors. Ah, child, don’t be angry with me. You shall have the folly of love, the madness of spring, the delusion of a moment compressed into a love-letter. Who offers a pretty woman wisdom on a spring day?”

“I want no love-letter because I have no lover; but when I find a young man to my liking, who better than yourself to write the letter?”

“Who indeed!” exclaimed the old man without a smile. “My words flow like a stream; they blossom like flowers; they sing to the clouds; they weep pathetically—tear-words in little valleys. Ah, if love could be like my letters, Ko-ngai, it would be worth having.”

The old man paused a moment, and looked at two women who were loudly talking about the faults of their husbands, and then observed: “Confucius has said: ‘A woman with a long tongue is a flight of steps leading to calamity.’” The bystanders laughed, and the women stopped talking about their husbands and upbraided the letter-writer instead.

When the crowd had ceased laughing and the angry women had moved away, Ko-ngai pulled the old man's sleeve, and said: "How is it that such a wrinkled, musty old fellow can write such wonderful love-letters? You, a thoroughgoing cynic, absorb the passions of your customers. Your brush flies over the paper, and behold! an aching heart has revealed its sorrow, or a happy heart its joy, in words that are not old and crabbed but young and fresh—so beseeching, so exquisite, so magical!"

"Much practice will accomplish a fine love-letter—Ah! pardon me a moment, Ko-ngai. Here is a gentleman in a hurry. There's a scowl on his face—temper in spring!"

The man in question hurried up and excitedly poured forth a story of his having had two pigs stolen from him. He explained that he knew the offender, and wanted a letter couched in abusive and threatening language calculated to make the rascal return the animals.

"That is easily done," said the letter-writer, and his brush dashed off the most bitter words he could think of. "See, here it is," he said when the letter was finished, "and you will get your pigs back again for the modest outlay of one halfpenny. Thank you."

The excited man took his departure, reading the letter as he went with a grin of satisfaction upon his face and profound admiration for the professional letter-writer.

“And so,” resumed Kouan-yu, “we turn from pigs to love. I have a fancy that before the spring has gone you will come to me and I shall write a love-letter for you. I wish, for your sake, that love’s cup may be all sweetness, that the ecstasy may last, and that you may never drink the dregs.”

Kouan-yu lit his pipe and watched the pale blue smoke curling up into the deep blue sky. The old man was dreaming; but Ko-ngai still stood by his side, trying to solve the mystery of his incomparable love-letters. Then she laughed gaily, and whispered :

“Have you ever been in love?”

For the first time that day the old man’s face relaxed into a smile. “I hold so many secrets,” he said gently, “that I have not the heart to tell my own. Was there ever a man who did not answer to the beckoning hand of a pretty woman, who did not follow after the ‘golden lilies’ of a maid? Go where you will, into the palace of princes, into the abode of scholars—ay, into the remotest temple on some distant mountain—you will never find a man who has not fallen under the spell of a woman.”

“Then, Kouan-yu, the dreamy-eyed, the spectacled, the bald-headed, the wrinkled, the ugly—you, too, have been in love?”

“Yes, even I was not always ugly and cynical; even I was in love once. In all my love-letters I am always writing either to Yua-nana or pretending that Yua-nana is writing to me. That’s how it’s done

little one—Hush ! What is the doctor saying now ? ”

The old man and the girl listened. In a shrill voice the doctor was shouting : “ My friends, in this bottle is the Elixir of Life. It will make the old young and the young retain youth for ever. It is no common drug. I had the secret from Shin Nung, who, as all the world knows, was born with a transparent stomach. Shin Nung learnt it from Si Wang Mu, and Si Wang Mu, being a most coy Goddess, wheedled the secret from the great P'an Ku, who evolved from chaos. Such a secret is yours for the asking—and for the payment of a few *cash*. Come, renew the vigour of youth and live for ever. Buy the famous Dr. Wang's Elixir of Life. Only a few bottles left, and the rare ingredients from which it is made will soon be unprocurable.”

Ko-ngai had listened to these words with rapture upon her face. She moved to join the gaping throng that stood about the loquacious doctor ; but the old man restrained her.

“ Don't go,” he said quietly. “ The man is imposing upon his hearers, and his jargon savours of the Western devils.”

“ But,” replied the girl eagerly, “ the elixir is so cheap, and he will soon be unable to get any more.”

“ There will always be plenty of water, child, and always something to colour it with, just so long as there are fools ready to plant down their money for

rubbish decked out in lying claptrap. All glory and honour to the old Taoists who did discover the Elixir of Life, who rose into the sky, communed with the Immortals and never looked into the sad eyes of Death. I, too, have seen strange marvels—mountains of pearl, seas of ruby, palaces of jade; and once I beheld the glory of the Western Royal Mother.”

By this time a crowd had collected about the old man, and, seeing the expectant faces of men and women and children, he took Ko-ngai aside, and whispered: “Come to my house to-night, and I will tell you a story.”

Ko-ngai looked up into his face with a smile. “You will tell me the story of your love?”

“Ay,” replied the old man, “about Yua-nana. Now go.”

The letter-writer resumed his accustomed place, and his wrinkled face became once more inscrutable. The people good-humouredly clamoured for a story, but he neither saw nor heard them. He was quietly dreaming in the busy, sun-flecked street.

II

That night Kouan-yu sat in his modest home, waiting for Ko-ngai. He was no longer clad in the faded and ancient garments of the professional letter-writer. He was arrayed in a rich robe of blue-and-brown silk. There was a spray of spring blossom by his side and a half-filled wine-cup.

When Ko-ngai entered the apartment the old man greeted her with a friendly smile.

"Your robe," said the woman, touching it with her little fingers—"how beautiful it is!"

"Brown is the colour of autumn and blue the colour of heaven," murmured the old man. "I only put on these garments when I am happy. I am happy to-night. See, here is tea for you. Drink it. It is not ordinary tea. It has the aroma of precious flowers, and it will make you happy, too."

"Liquid jade," laughed Ko-ngai as she raised the small porcelain cup to her lips. "Surely the liquid jade of Luwuh!"

"Ay," replied the old man, "liquid jade. You are quite classical in your allusions. Good. There is no reason why a woman should always be a shadow of a shadow in an old man's home."

"Your story, Kouan-yu, you have not forgotten your story?"

"Can I ever forget it? Listen. Draw close. Pluck a piece of that spring blossom and put it in your hair. So shall we celebrate to-night the Festival of a Hundred Flowers and the telling of a strange story with such a happy ending.

"When I was a young man, Ko-ngai, I was much given to study. I pondered over the sayings of Confucius and found them good, but not so good that they satisfied the cravings of my soul. I wanted something more than filial piety, more even than

the Lord Buddha had to give, for I found his teaching a paradox because in the act of giving he took so much away. I wanted to drink deep of life for ever.

“There were certain days when I wandered far into the country and left my books behind me, days when I gave myself up to the beauties of Nature. One day—oh! the unforgettable sweetness of that day—the wild peach blossom, the scent of the damp earth, the song of bubbling cascades, and the far-away glory of snow-covered mountains brought me peace. On one of those mountains I saw a hut from which there sounded a sweet, plaintive song. I could not hear the words of the song, but the voice floated down like the touch of a child’s hand. It entered my heart; it thrilled the blood in my veins. ‘Yonder,’ I said, shouting aloud for joy, ‘is a man who will be my guide. He has learned profound mysteries and discovered an abiding peace. I will go to him. I will drink of his wisdom and never thirst again.’ How golden was the sunlight when I uttered these words, and how glorious the waveless sea of the blue sky! The birds sang as they never sang before.

“It was a long way to the hut on the mountain; before I reached it I saw the sun lay his head on pillows of amber and sink to sleep behind a weary world. I saw the moon rise like a big bubble and go up, up into the sky. And the star-children came out to look at her, and some of them were only half

awake, for they blinked their silver eyes. It was bitterly cold. My feet were bruised and bleeding; but I pressed forward, glad of heart, for the sweet song grew louder, till it sounded like a clear-toned temple bell.

“When I reached the hut I saw a man of rare stature and with a countenance of wonderful beauty. I know not how to describe him, for now the gentleness of Kwanjin shone upon his face, and now the ineffable calm and wisdom of the Lord Buddha. Instinctively I knelt before him and prayed; but he raised me up, called me friend, and bade me enter. I was about to tell him of the song and how it had called me to him when, with a radiant smile, he said: ‘I know, seeker of beauty and peace. Remain with me here, patiently follow my instructions, and you shall not taste of death but of a life that knows no end.’

“Ah! Ko-ngai, how can I tell you of those wonderful days? The process of initiation was not easy. I made mistakes, I faltered, but my master was never angry. He explained so patiently the mystery of Tao, till even I learnt to walk upon the Way and to understand the secrets of existence. He read aloud strange books written by certain Taoists, who were more mystical, more spiritually venturesome than either Lao Tze or Chuang Tzu. He taught me to breathe in such a way that I learnt the joy of absolute control and tranquillity, till finally the very air sustained me without the need of food or drink.

"One night my master came to me, and said : 'Friend, you are now prepared to gaze upon the beauties of another world. Would you ascend to Heaven and see the Palace of Jade which the Yellow Emperor saw ? Would you go to the Kingdom of the Moon where the Immortal Tree grows ? Would you fly far, far away and look upon Si Wang Mu, the Western Royal Mother ?'

" 'Ay, master,' I replied, 'I would fain see the glories of which you speak.'

"Then my master brought forth a strange-looking powder that shone like the rainbow. 'This,' said he, 'is the Elixir of Life. Swallow it and you will be able to see all the wonders I have named.'

"When he had said these words, my master looked at me closely. 'Friend,' he whispered, 'there are those who, for all the beauties of the celestial world, yearn for human love. Should it be so with you, treasure this other powder, the Elixir of Death. Some there are who have found it the Elixir of Love.'

"I marvelled that my master should speak of death and human love. For a moment I had the foolishness to think that the great one erred. I was eager for the Elixir of Life, eager to try my power, to gaze upon beauties that never fade. 'To the Kingdom of the Western Royal Mother !' I cried as I swallowed the first powder my master had given me.

"I went to the door of the hut. I breathed the cold mountain air in the way my master had taught

me. In a moment I rose from the ground and travelled rapidly across the sky. Far away in the distance I saw Mount Kw'en-lun and observed upon it a mighty palace of gold and blue, and I knew that this was the abode of the Western Royal Mother. As I hovered above it two azure birds approached. 'We are the messengers of Si Wang Mu,' they cried. 'Lean upon our wings and we will carry you to her palace.' So, resting on the blue birds, I floated down to an open court. Here I discovered hundreds of laughing and dancing genii throwing flowers at each other in a wondrous light that was not of the sun, neither was it of the moon and stars. I left the court and passed into the palace that was filled with the perfume of a strange incense. Standing at the end of a dimly-lit apartment I saw the Western Royal Mother, and gazed at her beauty for a long, long time. Then, faint with desire, I left the palace and walked by the Lake of Gems. The waves broke into pearls and rubies on the shore. By the lake I saw a pear tree with golden fruit, the sacred tree that conveys the gift of immortality. 'To my dear master's hut,' I cried, intoxicated with the beauties I had seen. Up into the sky I flew—I was swept past the mountains of the moon, and so near to the stars that it seemed that I could almost gather them. Then, quicker than it takes to tell, I found myself in my master's hut."

The old man paused and looked at Ko-ngai. "Do you grow weary, little one? Is my story too long?"

"Go on, go on! I feel that something more wonderful is coming."

"Yes, yes," said the old man eagerly, "something more wonderful is coming now. Shortly after my visit to the Western Royal Mother, I wandered away from the mountain hut, strayed into the valley and mingled with the folk who could not perform marvels and laughed at the tales I told them. It was in this valley that I met Yua-nana. How red were her lips, and what laughter shone in her long eyes! I fell in love with Yua-nana. I said to her one day: 'I will go into the city and make money. You shall not wear cotton, but silk worked with blossoms and butterflies and little hills.'

"And so, having uttered many sweet words and exchanged with her many tender vows, I hastened to the city. Fortune favoured me, for in two years I had scraped together enough for us to be married, enough to dress the pretty Yua-nana in lovely garments.

"I returned to the village, carrying with me a robe of embroidered silk. When I entered the cottage where Yua-nana lived with her parents, I learnt that she had died that morning. I crept into the room where she lay and caressed her cold hands and pressed my cheek against her own. So still, so quiet she lay. When I had sat by her side for a long

time I arose and called Yua-nana's mother. She came to me, and between her sobs upbraided me for not returning sooner. 'So sad, so sad!' she kept on crying. 'So sad that she should die the day you came to take her away! Oh, fever is cruel! So sad, so sad!' 'Your daughter but sleeps,' I said gently. 'On yonder mountain is a man who can work miracles. Let me bear her to him. By the power of his magic he will wake her.' The woman looked at me, and then shrieked aloud: 'Mad, mad! My daughter's death has made you mad! So sad, so sad!'

"I had my way, little one. They dressed her in the rich garments I had brought for her dear use. When the night came I lifted Yua-nana in my arms, and slowly I carried her up the mountain path. Long before I reached the hut my master met me. I laid my precious burden at his feet. 'Master,' I cried, 'see, my loved one has fallen asleep with a smile on her face. Wake her, master. Surely one drop of the Elixir of Life——'

" 'Her soul is beyond recall,' said my master gently. 'Do you love her very much?'

"I wept for answer. I clutched his hand. I could not speak. Then I lifted my dead love in my arms and climbed to the summit of the mountain. 'Smile,' I said, 'smile under the snow, dear one, for in a little while you will hear me calling. You will come down from the mountain in your silk robes,' and as I talked,

I covered Flower of the Snow with a white garment. That is the end of the story, Ko-ngai."

"Old man," said Ko-ngai, her voice quivering with emotion. "Will you never die? You took the Elixir of Life, but you have said nothing about the Elixir of Death."

"No, I have said nothing about the Elixir of Death. I have written my last love-letter for a halfpenny. I shall never stand in the street again. Did I not tell you that I was happy to-night? This robe, these flowers—Ko-ngai, I have here something that is called the Elixir of Love. It will banish the snow on the mountain. It will make Yua-nana come to me."

The old man poured something into his wine-cup. He raised it to his lips with a smile. "Oh, Flower of the Snow, Flower of the Snow," he cried, "I come!" In a moment Kouan-yu fell forward, and in a moment two whispering shadows, so close together, sped out into the Far Beyond.

AUSTRIAN

THE DAWN

SAUNDERS had quarrelled with his wife.

It had been an ugly kind of quarrel in which words were pistol-shots inflicting deep wounds. Each had sought in the other a vulnerable spot, and, having found it, seized upon it with the savagery of a wild beast.

There had never been much romance in their married life, and that little had been wiped out by those words as completely as if it had never existed. There was no pity, no remorse on either side. It was not the kind of quarrel that could be made up again ; not the kind of domestic storm that could be patched with compromise or with that pitiable solvent known as peace-at-any-price. They had agreed to separate.

When the separation actually took place, people speculated as to its cause. Some pitied the man, some the woman ; but it was a pity based upon a complete ignorance of the whole business, for to do Saunders and his wife justice, they had washed their dirty linen in their own home, and they would continue to wash it, if need be, away from the prying eyes of the outside world.

Saunders had been the type of man who had clung to the idea that women were morally better than men, that they had a kind of divinity about them that invoked chivalry, tenderness, purity, self-sacrifice. In short, his outlook had been highly romantic. He thought a woman's outward beauty—and Saunders was never a Puritan—reflected the beauty of her soul. He had delighted to hold these ideals, and had managed to hold them for a long time.

Then the shattering storm burst upon him. He made the painful discovery that his wife, so far from reflecting his cherished ideals, had irretrievably fallen, and, in the fall, had broken the sanctity of wedded life. From that moment his view became distorted, his judgment soured. He saw guile lurking in every feminine smile. He came to regard the opposite sex as an abomination, a horrid kind of attraction that, in the end, meant utter ruin. Strindberg himself could not have held more insane ideas on the subject than did Saunders after the rude awakening.

A doctor advised Saunders to go abroad before he had him on his list as a severe mental case. Saunders demurred, but the smiling doctor was obdurate. "Get out of England," he said. "See fresh people, fresh scenes. Throw those wild ideas of yours overboard, for they are not worth as much as a dead ship's cat. Don't let your sense of humour rust, and I guarantee that you will come back a better man, capable of doing good and useful work."

Had the doctor attempted to moralise, attempted to make use of anæmic sentimentalism, or tried to over-persuade him, Saunders would have remained in England and probably gone to the dogs. But the doctor understood character pretty well. It was his method to make sure of it before he took temperatures or thumped patients on the back. He made allowances for temperament, and, most especially, for the artistic temperament.

Saunders knew this and appreciated it in a dull kind of way. It was the doctor's tact and foresight that made him yield at last.

"I'll go," he said, moodily. "I'll go to Austria; somewhere off the beaten track; somewhere where I can see mountains, climb them, and find vast spaces."

When Saunders left London, bound for Harwich, he took no notice of his travelling companions. He handed a book of green tickets to a young man in a frock-coat. The young man solemnly tore out a ticket, and returned the book with a bow. Saunders slipped it absent-mindedly into his pocket and stared out of the window to see the last glow of sunset race away from the thundering train. A child, with a deposit of bun round its mouth, was asking all manner of questions. "What's 'light articles'?" "Why can't we go all the way like this?" "Will that gentleman over there eat me?" But Saunders was oblivious. He was angrily groping among his fallen gods.

Saunders did not avail himself of a cabin. The whiff that came from the sleeping quarters reminded him of a menagerie. He remained on deck, covered with a heavy rug, and smoking a big pipe. He found the vibration of the screw trying. It seemed to be churning his spine as well as the sea. He moodily watched a line of gunboats in the distance. Their lights seemed to unite in a blur of yellow, and the throb of the engines became the heartbeat of some strange monster. Saunders was asleep.

When he awoke it was to see the Hook half blotted out in a mist of rain.

"What a hole!" he exclaimed, leaning over the side of the vessel. "What a God-forsaken hole to be pitched into at five o'clock in the morning."

He left the boat, stared at fussy officials in a barn of a Custom House, and had a cryptic sign chalked upon his hand-luggage.

Some one was blowing a horn in the station. A red-faced Englishman laughed, slapped his friend on the back, and said: "Oh, yes, these porter chaps blow horns out here! A horn blows a train out of a platform and gives a kind of rural touch. Funny? Yes. There are a lot of funny things in Holland. Cows wear aprons, dogs pull carts, windmills are as thick as blackberries in our country, and the women——"

Saunders moved on. He had no desire to hear about the women. He asked himself how it was that

women bulked so large in nearly every man's conversation. He didn't know, but he devoutly wished to exclude them from his thoughts, and most especially to double-bar his heart against them.

At Cologne Saunders got out, and, having a few hours to spare, wandered about the city. The blatant display of eau-de-Cologne reminded him of the sick-room. There were stacks of it, piled up in many shops, but none of its perfume reached the hot, dusty streets. Everywhere there was an odour of sausage and stale coffee, an odour that seems to be national and to permeate the whole of Germany.

Saunders went into the cathedral for precisely the same reason that he might have eaten an ice, namely, because it was cool. For a moment he was impressed by the beauty of the building, by the glorious harmony of every line. A pale-faced youth was kneeling before a sacred picture, his eyes rapturously fixed upon a wound in Our Lord's side. Near the High Altar a woman was praying before a tawdry figure of the Madonna. The scene moved Saunders deeply. He clenched his hot hands. "The same old worship of the feminine!" he whispered. "It's in the Church—everywhere. I can't get away from it yet. But in the mountains it will be different. I shall find peace there."

He left the cathedral and entered a busy café. Middle-aged business men, with either no hair or hair cropped close to the skin, were eating cakes

succulent with an abundance of cream. The sight of their pleasure amused Saunders. He smiled. He understood why Germans ate so much cream, why they adored fat and thrived upon it. Without these lubrications their language would stick in their throat and rasp the roof of their mouth. Saunders laughed. A German, wallowing in the middle of a cake crowned with a mountain of cream, hastily put down the confection with a puzzled expression on his face. Saunders laughed again. His sense of humour had revived. There was hope for him yet.

At Schladming Saunders got out. He had completed his journey so far as railways were concerned, and it now remained for him to walk about five miles to the mountain village where he had arranged to stay. As he slowly followed a steep footpath, he suddenly turned round to look at the view. He gazed for some time at snow-clad mountains that stretched for miles to right and left of him, peak rising above peak, a company of white immortals. The beauty of it all thrilled him. The past, though not forgotten, seemed less acute, less raw, less insistent. It seemed that, as he gazed upon these mountains, there was a subtle spell that had the power of healing the deepest of wounds, a spell that made life seem different. He went on again, his step more brisk, his spirits slowly but surely rising. Peasants accosted him with a "*Grüß Gott!*" and, not knowing precisely what they meant, he gave them an echo of

their words. He was struck by their simplicity, by a certain placid endurance and acceptance of the inevitable that marked most of their faces.

When Saunders reached the *pension* it was growing dark. The lady of the house greeted him cordially. She was middle-aged and possessed a face that alternated between the melancholy and the humorous. There was evidently no seduction here. He guessed that a goitre lay hidden beneath the cunningly contrived lace round her throat. Fashionable Vienna knew naught of her garments—a voluminous skirt and a series of little black tippets.

At seven o'clock the *pension* bell rang. Saunders came downstairs and entered the dining-room. Standing by the table, evidently waiting for the new visitor before sitting down, were a German lady and her daughter. He bowed, and they bowed in return, prepared at the start to make themselves agreeable to him.

Saunders looked at the girl as she sat before him. His first impression was that of displeasure; but, when he heard her talk, saw her smile, noted how artlessly her fair hair was arranged, and that her face and arms were sunburnt, he perceived that the woman had not dawned in her; that she was a child with all the high spirits of youth. The child, in his opinion, was a priceless gift before it turned into the dross of woman. With her, at any rate, he was entirely safe. He learnt that she had just celebrated

her twentieth birthday, and he learnt many other things from people who had a happy knack of dispensing with formalities and plunging into friendly intimacies straight away.

The meal over, Saunders joined Frau Lart and her daughter, and walked up and down the drive with them. There was something infectious about the girl's laughter. It made him laugh, too, without knowing precisely why. She was so slim, so full of life, and, what pleased him most, so utterly natural.

"I think you must be a kind of German fairy," he said presently, "and if only the adorable Hans Andersen were here, I am quite sure he would put you into one of his stories, and for once do away with a moral!"

Fräulein Lart rolled in the long grass, overcome with merriment. "Put me in a book?" she said, laughing. "Oh, how funny!"

In the morning he found the girl having breakfast on the veranda, presiding over two white jugs of cocoa and dipping a spoon into an egg. She smiled at him and shook hands. Saunders was assured that the way she shook hands was the way of schoolgirls shortly after they leave school. But her radiant smile puzzled him. It seemed to perform a miracle. The nose was slightly tilted, the blue eyes a trifle small, the chin firm, the mouth by no means perfect, and her features taken together and seen in repose scarcely made a beautiful or even a

strikingly pretty face. But her smile, revealing small and exquisite teeth, flawless and even, made all the difference. Saunders thought it was a pity she was not always smiling, seeing that her smile lifted her completely out of the commonplace and made her memorable.

“What are you thinking?” inquired the girl.

“I was thinking that the air here is extraordinarily bracing!”

“Oh, yes, it’s very bracing!” said the girl, going on with her egg. “It makes you *sehr lustig*.”

Again she smiled, and Saunders watched her with delight. “Excuse me,” he said presently, “your hair’s coming down!”

“It’s always coming down,” replied the girl, digging a hair-pin into a wayward tress.

“Then I shall call you Rapunzel. It doesn’t quite apply, because Rapunzel was a —, but it doesn’t matter what she was. Yes, I shall call you Rapunzel. May I?”

Fräulein Lart laughed merrily. “Of course you may. I like the name. It sounds pretty.” She repeated the word over and over again, pronouncing the second syllable in a quaint kind of way.

Saunders joined the Larts frequently. He let the girl put flowers in his coat; he let her feed him with wild strawberries, and allowed her to fill his pipe for him. On one occasion they all went into a village shop, and Saunders purchased a pair of Austrian

braces—green, with edelweiss worked in white wool. He retired to the back parlour for the purpose of putting them on. Before he knew exactly what was happening, Rapunzel had come to his assistance and was doing up the back buttons.

All these acts of hers were done so spontaneously, so artlessly, that they only tended to emphasise that she was a child. Had she been a woman, he argued, she would have been self-conscious, cautious, coy ; and Rapunzel was none of these things.

Saunders seemed to grow young again. He thought neither of the past nor future. He was well content with a present that was so cram-full of simple, innocent delights. The mountain wind had swept away that dignity that was so a part of him in England. He became rejuvenated. The bitter spring of disappointment had become sweet and clear once more. It seemed the most natural thing in the world that Rapunzel should tease him, and that he should tease her in return. He raced with her, danced with her, tickled her unmercifully with grass, and knocked down upon her hair a shower of dewdrops or blossom from the trees. To an onlooker, suddenly coming upon the scene, they were just two children playing together, to whom life was a splendid and delicious joke. Saunders loved to hear her sing from the "*Kinder Lieder*"; loved to hear her yodel and smilingly await the echo that did not always come.

Throughout these days of unalloyed happiness Saunders kept the child theory perpetually before him. He was quite sincere in his belief that Rapunzel, in spite of her twenty years, had none of the woman in her, as he understood that fateful word. It may be that the simple joys with which he was surrounded made him more primitive, less analytical, than he used to be. There was something about her touch that thrilled him.

When they lay together in the long grass, or shook hands, or sat by a stream, Saunders was conscious of a pleasure one does not associate with children. He ought to have read these signs, seen these danger signals, and shunted, as it were, into a quiet siding with a view to taking stock of himself. He ought to have discovered that his child theory was rapidly breaking down. The truth, obvious to others, was hidden from Saunders, and he continued to live in blissful ignorance of the true state of affairs.

One evening, when the "children" were leaning over the *pension* verandah, looking at the valleys and mountains, Saunders said: "I'm going to the *Austriahütte* to-night. I want to see the dawn."

"Alone?" inquired Rapunzel.

"Yes; it must be alone."

"I should love to come with you," said the girl eagerly. "I should love to be out all night under the stars, and in the early morning to see the sunrise—with you."

"There are mothers," observed Saunders drily—"dear, conventional mothers who would never dream of allowing their daughters to slip away so far from modern civilisation as to be out all night with a man."

"But you wouldn't do anything terrible. You're different, somehow."

"Convention, Rapunzel, allows for no difference where all men and women are tarred with the same brush. It is such a rule-of-thumb affair, so ancient and hoary, and, above all, so indecently suspicious, that it never by any chance becomes generous. I have asked your mother. She refused, evading the real issue by saying that you were not strong enough for so long a walk; that it would not do for you to be robbed of even one night's sleep. She doesn't know, as I know, that you are a child, ruled by a child's thoughts and impulses."

Rapunzel did not reply. Was he so blind that he had seen nothing? Had he never guessed her thoughts, that the child was fading and the woman filling her whole being, crying out, longing to be satisfied?

"You must take something to eat and drink," she said presently. "I'll go and make the coffee and butter some rolls." She touched his hand for a moment, flashed a look at him, and went hurriedly away, tears in her eyes.

"Such a dear, impulsive child!" said Saunders, lighting his pipe.

Just before midnight Saunders set out to see the dawn on the Austriahütte. The crescent moon had set, and the starlight was scarcely sufficient to enable him to find his way with any degree of certainty. No lantern had been available, and apart from a box of matches, he had no means of illumination. A corn-crake was making a whirring noise in a field. Saunders thought it was a bird-fisherman winding in on a magic reel all manner of splendid dreams. But he gave little thought to the night moods of Nature. He found himself thinking about Rapunzel. He wished she was by his side, laughing and singing and dancing. He was conscious of a sense of emptiness without her—this natural, spirited, sensitive child who had no touch of the woman in her.

Saunders passed through many silent, dusty farms, through many dew-drenched fields where *glocken* and marguerites were nodding their blue and white heads in gentle slumber. If Rapunzel had been there, he would have picked those flowers and wound them in her hair. He would have made her black dress, that did not suit her, a floral robe. He opened a gate, painted in the centre with bars of red and white, and plunged into a deep wood. He stumbled upon an ant-hill, a boulder, and bruised himself against the trees. He struck match after match, but their feeble flicker was impotent to dispel the gloom. After wandering about for some time,

he sat down, listening to the low murmur of the firs, to the noises of small life that stirred in the undergrowth.

Presently Saunders heard a sound that was neither of the wind nor of insect life. Some one was walking slowly through the wood. A peasant was evidently returning home. Saunders inquired the way to the *Austriahütte*. There was no reply, but the footsteps sounded nearer, then stopped.

Suddenly Saunders heard the sound of a match being struck. He saw a glow of light, and then another—that of a lighted candle. He leant forward and saw *Rapunzel* looking at him.

“Why did you come?” whispered the man, as if he were afraid the trees might hear him.

“I had to come. I couldn’t keep away. I wanted to be with you. Are you angry?”

“No; I am glad you came, *Rapunzel*. Sit down by me. Presently we shall be able to find our way out of the wood. Presently we shall see the dawn together. But not yet.”

Rapunzel sat down, shielding the lighted candle with her hand.

“Shall we blow it out?” said the man softly.

They blew out the candle together.

Neither wanted to talk. It was enough that they were together in the darkness, thinking their own thoughts, dreaming their own dreams.

Saunders felt the pressure of Rapunzel's arm. He noted its warmth. It seemed as if her blood were joyously dancing with his own for partner.

"How splendid!" said the girl, after they had sat silently together for some time.

"Yes," answered the man, "but the child has gone and the woman crept up in you—the woman!"

"The woman has come for you. You made it come. You called, you wanted it, and it means so much more than the child. Oh, I am glad the woman has come!"

Saunders took the girl's hand in his own. It lay there like a sun-warmed flower. He saw the danger-signals clearly now. He saw them in the dark, but he wanted to rush on and ignore them. He wanted to drink deep of happiness before the sickening crash came. Once he struggled against his delirious joy. Once he made an effort to speak of the past, to confess all. Then something told him that Love was greater than sorrow or pity. Something told him that, when Love came, everything else had to go, that Love must reign triumphant, the sole queen of a man's heart.

He could have taken her in his arms and given her a hundred passionate kisses. He knew Love had made her his, that she had suddenly removed the stigma that had marred his life, suddenly given a new and lasting glory to womanhood.

"Come," he said; "let us go and see the dawn."

Rapunzel lit the candle. There were tears in her eyes. Why had he withheld so much that she hungered for? She did not understand. Perhaps the dawn would make it clear. He would speak then. He was reserving beauty for beauty. That was it. To hear of Love with the making of the morning—ah! that would be fine indeed!

They found their way out of the wood, reached the summit of the *Austriahütte* and sat down hand in hand. They gazed upon a wonderful dream-world. The mountains were muffled in pale grey, still asleep, while a host of stars twinkled above them. Light was being poured into the darkness: miracles were happening every moment. The mountains awoke. They donned dazzling garments of amethyst, then of pink, and, finally, of lily white.

Away over the glorious head of the *Dachstein*, somewhere from the pearly morning, a thought suddenly flashed into Saunders's mind telling him that his wife was dead. He did not question the message any more than a wireless operator questions those silent calls at sea. He believed it was true, that telepathy had suddenly made the woman at his side his own, that he had caught the splendour of the dawn and held it in his heart.

"Rapunzel," he said gently, "my hands have been kissing you, and now my lips kiss you too." He leant forward and held her close in his arms.

"You will be my wife?" he said presently.

The girl looked up and smiled. "You know!" she said simply.

When they reached the *pension* Saunders found a wire awaiting him. He tore open the envelope and read: "Regret to say your wife passed away late last night."

He crumpled the message in his hand and threw it in the fire.

"Have you had bad news?" inquired the girl, looking at him anxiously.

"The dawn!" said the man quietly, taking Rapunzel in his arms. "The dawn!"

THE FIRE LILY

WHEN Austria-Hungary proclaimed war against Serbia there was considerable excitement in the Austrian village of Filzmoos. Men and women discussed the matter in the fields, in a forest of firs, through which a stream rushed as light-heartedly as ever, and on the mountain-side. The village streets were thronged with peasants who had suddenly thrown off their immobility of manner and were talking excitedly. The valleys were golden in the evening light, and so, too, were the snow-capped mountains. Mountain and valley alike suggested ancient peace and an aloofness that had nothing to do with war. The contrast between nature and human nature at this time was marked—the one stood for beauty, the other for the din of battle, for possession, vengeance.

The news of war was rapidly followed by marching orders. The men of Filzmoos were in receipt of a formal note instructing them to take up arms and fight for their country. Life in the field was instantly forgotten, and there was much cheering and singing and drinking, much playing of skittles in the village for bets that exceeded a ten-heller piece. The men were only too anxious to reach the battle-field and fight for their Emperor. They had heard the God of

War call lustily. It drowned the clang of cow-bell and all the familiar sounds of village life. It was a call that made the blood tingle and rush joyously in their veins, a call that overruled all peaceful domestic ties.

The women heard the call too—in a different way, with death murmuring back a plaintive echo. Already they were fighting a silent battle in their hearts. They would be left behind to work in the fields, to gather in wood for winter, to keep the homes together. No drums sounded for them, no banners waved. They had to endure, to wait, to hope—that was all; and of the agony of these things they never said a word. Their men were soldiers and not peasants now. The War God's call had made a mockery of the very name of husband, brother, lover. Their long pipes were laid aside, the flower-worked knickers, the gay waistcoats and green Tyrolese hats, in exchange for military uniform and a rifle.

Most of the men of Filzmoos took their marching orders with unbounded delight. They rejoiced to be able to leave behind them the dull routine of an agricultural calling. It was an honour to fight for their country, to join their patriots, and to strike a blow against a nation that had assassinated their Crown Prince Ferdinand.

There was one man in Filzmoos to whom the marching orders brought no pleasure. Joseph Metzel was

his name, and when he heard the news of war, and was commanded, like the rest, to fight for his country, he turned pale and stole away from the bands of merrymakers. Battle filled him with horror, disgust, for this gentle soul had not the heart to slay a bird. The spirit of slaughter was not in him. He loved the mountains and valleys, the village church and priest. The priest, Father Bonner, was the one man who understood his craving for beauty. They had spent many an evening together poring over books. Rosegger, Goethe, Heine, a translation of Shakespeare, had all been read and discussed. Father Bonner had a genuine affection for Joseph Metzel, for he recognised in him a man with the heart of a poet, a man of deeper sympathies and wider intelligence than was to be discovered in other village folk.

When Metzel slunk away from the merrymakers, who had pointed at him and jeeringly called him "coward," he went to the house of Father Bonner.

Father Bonner was pacing up and down his room. "I have taught the way of peace," he said wearily, bidding Metzel be seated, "and now all my teaching is of no avail. The beast of war has awakened in our people. They go to slaughter their enemies, not knowing that their enemies are their brothers and that the Almighty is the blessed Father of us all. We remember God only as the God of Battle. We think to please Him with the incense of human

sacrifice . . . And you, Metzel, you will answer the call too?"

"I shall answer it," said Metzel quietly. "Already I have been called a coward and jeered at because I see no glory in war. But I shall go. I shall fight. I shall try to do my duty."

"Since negotiations for peace have failed," observed Father Bonner, "it may be that war is inevitable after all. Whether this is so or not, you, Joseph Metzel, will not be found wanting when the time comes. God, knowing your heart, will give you strength and cast back the lie that came from these men who called you coward. Joseph Metzel, my friend, something tells me that in spite of fear, loathing, you will prove yourself to be a brave man in battle, a man we shall be proud of, and I most of all."

Metzel's handsome face was grave. "I am sorry to disappoint you," he said, shaking his head despondently, "but I am a coward, and I deserve all the jibes that have been thrown at me. The other men are buoyed up by excitement. Many of them have sweethearts who favour them with smiles, and more than smiles, and the love of these maids makes their hearts bold. I know nothing of these things, Father, and knowing nothing of them there is no fire to quicken my step, to steady my hand, to make me shout for joy at the very thought of a cannon's roar."

Father Bonner smiled. "Romance is a poor substitute for the love of God," he said. "Take heart, Joseph, and look only to Him for strength that shall not fail you in your hour of need."

"We leave early in the morning," said Metzel, his voice shaking. "Let us say good-bye now."

Priest and peasant held each other's hand in silence.

"If I do not come back," said Metzel at the door, "try to think well of me."

"I shall always think well of you," replied Father Bonner. "I shall be at my bedroom window when you pass. My thoughts, my prayers, will go with you on the battle-field;" and with these words the men parted.

At dawn next morning all were astir in Filzmoos. The men had assembled together and were cracking jokes, many of them showing signs of the previous night's revelry. When Metzel, pale and trembling, joined the ranks, they laughed at him. "You had better mind the goats and sheep, Metzel, for you will be useless in battle," said one. "Let Joseph stop behind with the women," said another, "for we all know him to be a woman-hearted man who would faint at the sight of blood and make a gun or sword shake like grass in the wind." At these sallies, and many others of a more brutal kind, the men laughed heartily, and even the weeping women standing in the road tittered and whispered and pointed their fingers scornfully at Metzel,

Metzel pretended not to hear, but as he stood, shuffling from foot to foot, his heart ached with bitter humiliation. To know that there was something in these taunts, cruel as they were, only tended to make his sufferings more acute. He looked about him helplessly, feeling himself to be the village fool, the village coward, the despised of all.

There was one woman who took no part in this unseemly behaviour. She was looking at Joseph as no other woman looked. Her cheeks were flushed with shame at the coarse jibes she heard on every hand. She carried a fire lily freshly gathered from the fields that morning.

“Joseph Metzel,” she said suddenly, “come here, I want you.”

Metzel stepped out of the ranks. The men had stopped talking and laughing. Could this be the beautiful Roselle who had spoken? What could she want with the miserable Metzel, the coward Metzel, who had not the heart to fight for his country?

“For you,” said Roselle, thrusting the fire lily in Metzel’s coat. “The others may mock you, Joseph, but I do not. For long I have secretly loved you. Now I wish you to know my secret because I want my love to make you strong.”

She uttered these words in a loud, clear voice, and the men who heard her stood abashed. Roselle, acknowledged by all to be the most beautiful girl in the village, one who, with a high hand, had sent

many a would-be wooer away, had publicly proclaimed her love, and shown a feeling as warm and brilliant as the glow of the fire lily she had picked for Metzel.

Metzel looked into the blue eyes of Roselle for a long time. Her words had rushed to his heart and suddenly made it strong, suddenly made war possible, nay, glorious, even for him.

"Thank you," he said simply, looking down proudly at the flower in his coat. "I shall wear it always. Thank you."

He extended his hand. Roselle held it for a moment: then she leant forward and kissed him. "Go back now," she whispered with a smile, "and if you love me as I love you, something splendid will happen."

"Something splendid shall happen," said Metzel, holding his head high and walking with a firm step. "Something splendid shall happen . . . because of you."

A signal sounded. The men moved forward, accompanied by many women and children who were crying and clinging to those they loved. But Roselle sat on a gate smiling at Metzel and waving her handkerchief till the soldier-peasants were out of sight.

Metzel looked up at the priest's house. He saw his old friend peeping out of the window. Joseph smiled at him and pointed at the fire lily in his coat. But

Father Bonner did not see the lily. He only saw the radiant smile.

"God has given him strength," he said, turning away with tears in his eyes, turning away to pray for one who was laying down his life for his country, an unwilling victim of the madness of war.

About a month later a messenger came from Gratz. He came at a time when the women, Roselle among them, were gathering in the hay. They were still working in the moonlit fields when the man slowly walked by.

"This is Filzmoos, is it not?" inquired the messenger.

"Filzmoos," replied Roselle. "Do you bring news of the war, news of our men?"

"Joseph Metzel," said the messenger deliberately, "was he a Filzmoos man?"

"Yes," came a chorus of voices. "Born here."

"Then Filzmoos is a thrice-honoured village because of him."

Roselle's cheeks burned. Her eyes shone brightly. "Go on," she said quickly, "go on!"

"Joseph Metzel is a hero," said the man. "When the odds were against our army, and panic and flight seemed certain, he rallied the men with a message all Austria will remember to his glory. He fought with a bravery that was almost miraculous. For a moment it seemed as if his life were a charmed

one. For a moment nothing seemed to impede his progress. He became a commanding force that impelled the service of the men. He gave them courage, he who was courage itself. 'The Serbian standard,' he shouted; 'we must take it!'"

The messenger paused for a moment. Then he said, looking straight at Roselle: "It was Joseph Metzel who captured the Serbian standard."

A murmur of applause went up from the women, while Roselle stood with parted lips and clenched hands.

The messenger began to move away. Roselle came forward and stopped him. "You have not told all the news," she said in a whisper.

"Not quite all," replied the man, unable to look at her now. "Joseph Metzel is dead. He was shot down with the Serbian standard in his hand. He was buried with military honours, and before he was laid to rest they found, sewn on the inside of his shirt, a piece of paper containing the faded petals of a flower."

Roselle walked quickly to a wayside shrine and wept before a figure of Our Lord.

Father Bonner found her thus. He stood by her side for some time. Then he touched her on the shoulder.

"My poor Roselle, my poor Roselle!" he said softly. "There is a glory in our sorrow. Joseph Metzel is a brave man. The Lord gave him strength."

Roselle looked up at the priest and smiled between her tears. "Love gave him strength," she said quietly, "my love that glowed in the fire lily he wore for my sake."